The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/165)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Pakistan and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Security Council, I welcome Her Excellency Ms. Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of the Afghan High Peace Council; and Ms. Mariam Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/198, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the Netherlands.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/165, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

The President: The result of the voting is as follows. The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2405 (2018).

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and to focus on key issues. Briefers are further encouraged to limit initial remarks to 15 minutes or less.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: I would like to thank you, Madam President, for scheduling this meeting on Afghanistan on International Women's Day. I wish to express my appreciation for Minister Kaag's initiative to lead an all-women delegation today and to encourage other members to do the same. I am also very pleased that the Afghan delegation is joined today by Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi. They are two women with distinguished careers in working for the advancement of peace in Afghanistan.

The members of the Council witnessed for themselves the importance of women's rights and women's empowerment during their recent visit to Kabul. I am sure that they were deeply impressed, as I am, by the resilience of Afghan women, whose strength holds the fabric of society together. I will touch on the women, peace and security agenda throughout my briefing.

A week ago, Afghanistan successfully hosted the second conference of the Kabul Process for peace and security. All conference participants endorsed the call for direct talks between the Government and the Taliban without preconditions. All relevant parties, including the Taliban, agree that a negotiated political settlement is the way to bring an end to the conflict.

President Ashraf Ghani offered peace to the Taliban without preconditions and laid out a path for negotiations, with a series of concrete proposals, to

create a space for the opening of talks. The offer of negotiations is on the table. It is now incumbent upon the Taliban to come forward with an offer of their own and to start direct talks with the Government in order to put an end to the suffering of the Afghan people. The Taliban's argument that they will not talk to the Afghan Government because the conflict is not between Afghan parties misrepresents the reality that tens of thousands of Afghan people are killed and maimed every year in direct confrontations between the Taliban and the Government forces.

Making peace and reaching out to opponents requires resolve, courage and, above all, national unity. Looking at recent developments in domestic political, I am compelled to express my concern about some actions that could deepen divisions in society. Political leaders need to place the national interest above a partisan agenda. National unity provides the only basis for the continuation of international support to Afghanistan and for the implementation of effective reforms. Political stability also requires inclusivity. The prolonged political impasse over the governorship of Balkh should be resolved swiftly through a negotiated solution. It must not undermine the authority of the National Unity Government or hinder progress on the delivery of key Government functions. The upcoming elections provide a further opportunity to ensure that unity and stability prevail and that all groups are represented.

When the members of the Council visited Afghanistan in January, they delivered a clear and strong message that parliamentary elections must be held in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019. Since then, there has been accelerated progress on preparations for voter registration. The Independent Election Commission, under its new Chairperson, is working hard on electoral preparations, but the timelines remain tight. In one of his first statements, the Chairperson of the Commission acknowledged that elections would most probably have to be delayed beyond the current date of July 2018 but that they could still be held this year as long as preparations are not delayed and voter registration begins on schedule in April.

The Independent Election Commission must also concentrate on areas where it can deliver and seek the assistance of other agencies of the Government in areas that need to be accelerated, such as the recruitment of voter registration staff. The Afghanistan Central Civil Registration Authority must now do all it can to enable eligible Afghan citizens to register to vote by issuing citizen identity cards, known in Afghanistan as *tazkeras*, to the millions of people who do not possess them. Public outreach is important. Afghan voters will need to understand the importance for them to cast their votes, even though they may have serious concerns about the electoral system because of past experiences. The United Nations is working with the Commission to ensure women's participation in all stages of the elections — as candidates, campaigners and voters.

The new penal code, which entered into force on 14 February, reinforces Afghanistan's compliance with international human rights and criminal justice standards and is a milestone in the country's criminal justice reform. We wholeheartedly welcome its coming into force. UNAMA played a valuable role in drafting the code. I am pleased to report, on today's International Women's Day, that the Afghan Cabinet has adopted the necessary amendment to the penal code to ensure that all provisions of the Elimination of Violence against Women law continue to apply, giving Afghan women continuing legal protection from violence.

Women are also disproportionately affected by the conflict. More than 1,200 women were killed or injured last year, mostly from ground fighting and suicide attacks. I am particularly concerned by the increase in civilian casualties caused by the Islamic State in Khorasan Province, which has been expanding its geographical spread beyond the hitherto stronghold of eastern Afghanistan into northern Afghanistan. We are monitoring those developments very carefully in the light of potentially destabilizing effects in the north and beyond.

I would like to turn to another issue of pressing importance, which is the question of refugees and displaced persons. Pakistan and Iran have generously hosted Afghan refugees for decades in times of great needs, and we appreciate their contribution. It should not be forgotten that 1.5 million people returned to Afghanistan in 2016 and 2017. The Afghan Government has welcomed the return of its citizens, but such large numbers inevitably stress the Government's ability to provide services. Assurances that returnees would gain access to land, housing and basic services have unfortunately not been realized. We believe that gap must be addressed before encouraging more people to move back to their homeland voluntarily. It is possible, and even likely, that hundreds of thousands more

Afghans will return from Pakistan this year alone. While the international aid community is preparing contingency plans to provide short-term help, the responsibility for people's protection and welfare rests with the State. Simply put, only the State can provide land, guarantee property rights and ensure adequate provision of services.

With regard to investment and improving Afghanistan's economy, I am pleased to note the recent ground-breaking ceremony for the construction in Afghanistan of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline. The nearly 2,000-kilometre-long pipeline will be able to transfer 33 billion cubic metres of gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India through Afghanistan. The ground-breaking was not only a success for regional cooperation and integration, but the beginning of the fulfilment of a long-standing project in Afghanistan that will contribute significantly to Afghanistan's economic self-reliance.

UNAMA appreciate's the Council's adoption of a renewed mandate for UNAMA. We have important tasks ahead of us this year, including peace efforts, the upcoming elections and the ministerial conference on Afghanistan, which the United Nations looks forward to hosting with the Government of Afghanistan in Geneva on 28 November. I must also mention the critical areas of human rights and reforms, including with regard to anti-corruption efforts. As we work with and for the people and the Government of Afghanistan, we look to the Security Council to provide us with a clear mandate.

The President: I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Sarabi.

Ms. Sarabi: It is indeed an honour for me to be here today to represent Afghan women. I thank the delegation of the Netherlands for the opportunity to participate in this meeting.

I am very hopeful that the Security Council gained a very clear picture of the situation during its their last visit to Kabul. I thank the Council for coming to visit us. Surely, that will pave the way for new opportunities to reiterate the Council's support for the people of Afghanistan, especially women. Women's lives have changed remarkably in the past 17 years, and two factors are responsible for that change.

One of them is the tireless efforts and persistent struggles of women themselves; the other is the Afghanistan's Constitution, which includes important articles in favour of women that have enabled them to become engaged in political and social issues in the country. In addition to the Afghan Constitution, which provides equal rights for both Afghan men and women, on 5 March 2003, Afghanistan joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In addition, laws were adopted on eliminating violence against women and preventing sexual harassment.

Afghanistan today is well equipped with national policies and international commitments to support women's empowerment. Afghanistan's Constitution guarantees equal rights before the law for both women and men. Similarly, the Constitution guarantees women's access to education, health care and social inclusion. After 17 years, Afghanistan has in place key legislation, policies and national plans that further increase the Government's obligation to strengthen women's participation and equal rights.

Afghan women's inclusion in some of the key decision-making roles at the central and provincial levels is remarkable. Women's presence today in the Cabinet, the Parliament, the Senate, provincial councils, the High Peace Council, the security sector and civil society is also remarkable. The post of Deputy Attorney General for the prohibition of violence against women has been established, and there are currently 242 women prosecutors working in different departments, including that on the elimination of violence against women. There are also 300 female judges, who are working to ensure the rule of law and prevent violence against women. In addition, 800 out of 4,000 defence attorneys are female. In addition, family response units are actively working throughout all 34 provinces. With regard to the security sector, a total of 3,144 female police officers are working in the Ministry of the Interior, with a target to increase that number to 5,000. And 1,500 women are currently playing an active role in the Ministry of Defence.

The Government's initiatives have led to significant achievements in education and training, which translate into an increase in the number of girls attending school from 3.5 million in 2013 to 3.6 million in 2015 — 40 per cent of the total number of students attending school. Young girls continue to pursue higher education after graduating from school, either in the country or abroad.

The number of professors in governmental universities increased from 3,159 to 5,582 in three years, of whom 774 are female. It is worth mentioning that the National Unity Government has not limited women just to the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and that the role of women in governance has expanded to all departments. For example, a 50 per cent presence of women in the Citizens Charter National Priority Programme is guaranteed.

In July 2015, the Government of Afghanistan launched its first national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). The plan involves collaboration with other Government agencies, civil society organizations and international organizations to implement resolution 1325 (2000). In Government leadership, there are 3 female Ministers and 11 female Deputy Ministers, but what is worth mentioning is the significant presence of women at the middle-management level.

Afghan women have made significant progress in small and medium-sized businesses. For example, the Chamber of Commerce for Women has been established to empower and support Afghan women in business. We are proud of the growth of the role of women in civil society. Although they are still young, their advocacy skills are commendable. An estimated 2,000 female employees are actively working in the media sector, where up to 50 print, video and audio media outlets are run by women.

Women's participation in sports is another tangible achievement. The number of Afghan girls in sports now exceeds 12,000, and in the past three years they have won 50 foreign medals. Sportswomen have been well represented in various sports, especially the Bamyan Mountain Peace Cup bicycle-racing championship.

Women are actively engaged in the peace process. Out of a total of 65 members of the High Peace Council, one in a leadership position, four in the executive and twelve in the General Assembly are women. Sixty-three women out of 320 are also members of the Provincial Peace Committee. Right now, women are represented at all levels of the High Peace Council. In the High Peace Council, the leadership and all members — including myself as a Deputy Chairperson — have always maintained and respected the idea that peace without women's meaningful participation is impossible. Therefore, we are committed to boosting women's role at all levels of the peacebuilding process, ensuring their participation in leadership and safeguarding their rights.

The High Peace Council and I also believe that social peace is paving the way for political peace. That is why we initiated the Women's Peace Network, which we call the "mothers of peace". The first phase is now complete and the second will start very soon, in late March. The Network will bring changes to the mindset of the people from one of violence to one of peace.

The High Peace Council has also created a women's advisory board, where rural women from 34 provinces, in addition to Provincial Peace Committee members, will meet on a quarterly basis and share their concerns and ideas for improving our operations. We are committed to increasing the number of female members in the Committee from two to three in each province.

At the second Kabul Process conference, the Afghan Government shared the road map for peace. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani offered talks with the Taliban without preconditions. He added:

> "The Taliban will be recognized as a political party in the structure of the Constitution and by the Afghan Government if they obey the rule of law and respect women's rights, which is one of the strategic priorities for Afghanistan's international partners."

Also, one of the subjects mentioned in the proposal is a provision for the rights and safety of all citizens of Afghanistan, especially women, in accordance with the Constitution.

These are achievements for Afghan women, but some challenges remain and I shall highlight just the principal ones. First, violence against women remains very high throughout Afghanistan. Secondly, there is a lack of awareness and rule of law for the implementation of gender equality. Thirdly, access to higher education is difficult, especially for girls who are married young and cannot pursue their education. Fourthly, election campaigning for women, especially in rural areas, is still a challenge.

I should like to make the following recommendations.

We must ensure that women's rights are non-negotiable at any level of the peace dialogue. We must make a commitment to including women's meaningful participation in all agendas at the negotiating table and in decision-making in peace and reconciliation processes. We must ensure that the

female members of the Provincial Peace Committee have the capacity to negotiate and lobby. We must also ensure specific and sufficient allocation of budgets and corresponding financing mechanisms for the effective implementation of the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), and include women in initiatives related to improving livelihoods and community-based projects to strengthen development outcomes and address risks.

Afghan women expect their partners to stand by them, bring peace and security and uproot the pervasive phenomenon of terrorism, because if we are the primary victims today, surely tomorrow others will be next.

The President: I thank Ms. Sarabi for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Safi.

Ms. Safi: I thank you, Madam President, for giving me the opportunity to address the Security Council today. I should like to thank the Netherlands, as the President of the Council this month, for inviting me to share my perspectives on the Afghan peace process.

Today, in my capacity as a peacebuilder and member of the research community in Afghanistan, I would like to touch on the current trends, conditions on the ground and key issues relating to the Afghan peace process. The perspectives I will be sharing with the Council today have been deeply informed by a decade of consultations I have led as part of our efforts at the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies with diverse sectors, community members and the brave and resilient women of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has witnessed great progress since 2001. This is reflected in the emergence of a bright and vibrant new generation of youth, the representation of women in all sectors of Afghan society and the strengthening of a promising democratic system of governance. Seventeen years ago, hope replaced despair as Afghans embarked on the path towards a peaceful and stable future where conflict would become a distant memory. We welcomed international investment and commitment to supporting that hope.

But as I speak here, I must tell Council members that this hope is fading. The theater of conflict is becoming more confusing, complicated and lethal. In 2001, we were fighting one group; we are now fighting over 20 regional and international terrorist organizations. Safe zones have now become battlefields that extend from rural to urban areas. The Taliban, its affiliated group the Haqqani Network, and fighters affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant are now targeting civilians, including women and children.

In 2009, 285 women were killed as a result of the ongoing conflict. As mentioned earlier, that number rose to 1,224 in 2017. That is extremely alarming. Let us not forget last year's killing of 9-year-old Shukria, who, while travelling with her family from Ghazni province to Quetta, was stopped by insurgents, held captive and later beheaded. That incident prompted nationwide protests and made it very clear that Afghans would not tolerate impunity for those targeting civilians.

Despite the Taliban committing to a code of conduct on the protection of civilians, the group continues to carry out attacks in densely populated areas, showing no regard for civilian lives. I implore the Security Council and the international community to ensure that transitional justice is not compromised in the pursuit of peace and reconciliation. The peace deal with Hizb-i Islami, signed in September 2016, showed us that peace is possible in Afghanistan. However, it also showed how easily actors could sideline the need for community healing, exclude women and civil society engagement and take steps that reinforce a culture of impunity in the pursuit of achieving peace.

While security challenges remain the predominant source of concern, it is not the only cause of despair among Afghans. Our recent findings indicate that insecurity and political instability go hand in hand, and are the two primary drivers for Afghans fleeing. For the first time in Afghanistan's history, we are now witnessing young, single Afghan women making up a significant portion of those undertaking the dangerous journey out of the country.

As Ms. Sarabi just described, the second round of the Kabul Process culminated last week with the Afghan Government presenting a detailed offer of peace to the Taliban for the first time. While there has long been national consensus on the need for peace among Afghans, there still remain serious and diverging concerns on the best way forward for peace to unfold. Fundamental questions remain on whether the time is right for such negotiations. What are the red lines for negotiations? What would justice look like in an eventual settlement? How will the rights of women be upheld and protected? How will the participation of women at all levels be guaranteed in the implementation and monitoring of any agreement reached? What is the way forward after a peace agreement is reached,

and what will that peace mean to different sectors of Afghan society?

For women, it is imperative for the State to define the type of peace that would ensue from reconciliation. Our findings show that women believe that the future of their rights is intricately tied to the outcomes of the peace process. Habiba from Kunduz province told us that the gains of the past 17 years in women's empowerment, freedom of speech, human rights and civil values should not be open for negotiation. On the question of reintegrating ex-combatants, women, particularly those living in rural areas, expressed fear of an escalation of violence and further suppression of women. How those reintegrated would be monitored after a peace agreement is also a significant source of concern.

The Afghan Government's launch of the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, in 2015 offered great possibilities for the promotion of women's involvement in all areas related to peace and security. However, its implementation continues to suffer setbacks, rendering women's voices as symbolic at decision-making levels. For example, while gender units have been created within most ministries in legal structures, they lack the necessary tools and budget required to carry out the mandate of resolution 1325 (2000). The time has come to expand women's roles from one of mere presence to active engagement, consultation and inclusion. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the Afghan Government and civil society organizations must work together towards identifying where the bottlenecks lie and adopt concrete and genuine measures to address those gaps. Only then can we create spaces where women, both formally and informally, are able to realize their agency.

There is also a great disconnect between the rhetoric of local ownership and how it is actually implemented. The selective nature with which the High Peace Council chooses the narratives it incorporates into its peace agenda, the civil society actors it decides to engage with and the priorities it chooses to focus on have led many to question its legitimacy, credibility and objectivity.

Real and meaningful progress notwithstanding, the Afghan Government remains weak, with financial, security and internal strife mounting. We must therefore be cognizant that any proposed changes to the Constitution as a result of a peace agreement must not erode the rights and freedoms of all Afghan citizens. I appeal to the Security Council to closely monitor any amendments to the Constitution, ensure that the sequencing of peace-making activities and overtures are supported with confidence-building measures from the Taliban and, lastly, facilitate greater engagement between the High Peace Council and diverse actors of Afghan society to ensure that all narratives are represented and supported through national consensus.

In conclusion, past experiences show us that supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process is not enough to prevent and combat terrorism. When we asked women at the rural level what they saw as an obstacle to achieving peace in Afghanistan, almost all highlighted regional interference. The Security Council and the international community must persuade Pakistan to engage constructively in all efforts to curb the threat of terrorism and support an intra-Afghan dialogue for peace.

Afghanistan's international partners have repeatedly expressed their intention and will to stand behind the people of Afghanistan to bring about lasting peace, security and stability. Today, I urge those present to stand beside us, and not behind us.

The President: I thank Ms. Safi for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me begin by congratulating the Netherlands on assuming the presidency of the Security Council, and by thanking you, Madam President, for convening today's debate on Afghanistan, which coincides with International Women's Day. We pay tribute today to the important contributions of women in promoting stable and prosperous societies. It is an occasion to focus on what more needs to be done to empower women against the many challenges they face, particularly in conflict and post-conflict societies.

I am pleased that Her Excellency Ms. Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, will be joining us later on, and my dear colleague, Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, and Ms. Mariam Safi are among us here today. I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his briefing.

Today's meeting provides another occasion to assess the overall situation in Afghanistan. I am pleased to report that, in the course of the past three months, the imperatives of Afghanistan's security, stability and development received added international attention, with particular focus on addressing the root causes of the conflict and strengthening our defensive and security capabilities, in parallel with efforts to devise a more practical peace plan.

Our security forces, with better support from international partners, have increased pressure on terrorist groups across the country. Nevertheless, regional sponsors of terrorism, having faced international pressure and setbacks in the countryside, remain belligerent, as reflected by their efforts to engineer violent attacks in urban centres with high numbers of civilian casualties. Despite that, governance reform and economic development have continued unabated. A national dialogue among various political forces has been under way on issues that are crucial to our unity and political stability, the success of our peace efforts and preparations for holding timely and transparent parliamentary elections this year.

Afghanistan has always emphasized that our partnership with the international community has been a strategic asset for advancing shared goals of defeating terrorism and achieving stability. In that light, the Council's visit to Kabul from 13 to 15 January and its high-level meeting on 19 January on the security and development of Afghanistan and Central Asia (see S/PV.8162) were clear signs of international support at the highest level. We are grateful to all members of the Council for their collective commitment and improved consensus on a more focused engagement on key issues related to Afghanistan's security, stability and development. We wish to offer a special debt of gratitude to my friend and colleague Ambassador Kairat Umarov for his personal efforts in that regard as President of the Council during the month of January.

During the Kabul visit, the Council discussed a range of security, political, economic and social issues with Afghanistan's leadership in Government, the Parliament, the judiciary, the High Peace Council, political parties and civil society. One common request pertained to effective Council action to address the sponsorship of terrorist outfits and the problem of their regional safe havens as priority needs for security and stability in Afghanistan. That was highlighted by Ms. Safi here today. It is also reflected in the recent report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2018/165).

Of late, we have seen new measures at the international level to change the calculus and promote genuine and productive counter-terrorism cooperation. In that regard, recent decisions, including the reduction of financial aid to the State concerned and its inclusion in the watch list of the Financial Action Task Force represent a renewed attempt to encourage genuine action on the crucially important goal of defeating terrorism effectively. We hope that the trend continues and that the response to those measures is positive, in the interest of peace and security in Afghanistan and the region.

Days after the Council's visit and almost immediately after the 19 January high-level meeting of the Council, regional sponsors of terrorism, through their trained violent proxies, unleashed a new wave of terrorist attacks. The sheer level of savagery in those despicable and heinous attacks was startling. Armed gunmen from the Taliban's Haqqani Network attacked the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul, killing 18, including 14 foreign nationals, and wounding many more. The subsequent week witnessed two more barbaric attacks — one in the Jalalabad compound of the international non-governmental organization Save the Children, where 27 people died, and the other was an explosives-laden ambulance detonated next to a major civilian hospital in the heart of Kabul. The blast destroyed vehicles, shops and buildings nearby, killing at least 105 civilians and injuring 235. The use of an ambulance for such a ghastly attack is a war crime under international law, including international humanitarian law. The Council condemned the attacks and cited the need to hold the perpetrators, organizers and financiers of the attacks to account. Yet, despite all of the evidence linking those attacks to regional sponsors, the question once again is, When will that happen?

Last week, Afghanistan convened the second conference of the Kabul Process for peace and security. That marked a major development in the context of peace efforts aimed at ending the conflict and achieving a credible and just peace that conforms to the aspirations of all Afghans. In recognition of our people's demand for ending violence, President Ghani reached out to the Taliban in an unprecedented manner, calling for direct talks without preconditions. Should his call receive a positive response, the Taliban will be granted the chance to become normal citizens, to

compete peacefully in politics through democratic procedures, to be relieved of Security Council sanctions measures and to enjoy the benefits of other positive measures. In turn, they will have to give up their long-standing path of violence. Moreover, our peace process aims to protect and expand, not diminish, the rights of our people, especially women. The time is now for the Taliban to respond affirmatively and seize the historic opportunity before them. We are inspired by the international community's level of support for our new peace plan. The conference renewed the call for tangible measures for combating terrorism, in accordance with obligations stipulated in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and various Security Council counter-terrorism resolutions. We hope that States that have failed in that endeavour will adopt a new approach based on express commitments for the benefit of regional security.

For too long, the debate on State-sponsored terrorism has been kept away from international forums, including the United Nations. Beyond the intelligence networks, the rest of the world knows little about the behaviour of that aspect of terrorism at national, regional and international levels. The regional State sponsors of terror outfits exported to our country have recently pursued new methods of denial and belligerence by using reverse psychology and attempting to distort narratives. Irrefutable evidence of complicity in facilitating safe havens and logistical support to terrorists has been responded to by failed methods of counter-narratives, accusing Afghanistan of "providing safe havens to terrorists". Exploiting the democratic political dynamics of Afghanistan, they attempt to sow discord among our people, victimize our refugees by unfairly linking them to terrorism and portray their orchestrated terror attacks as civil war.

Meanwhile, according to the latest United Nations report, we have suffered more than 10,000 civilian casualties yearly over the past four years, mainly due to terrorist attacks plotted beyond our frontiers. In their desperation, they do not even hold back from such heavily risk-prone attempts as to abuse and manipulate ironclad and all-weather friendships in international relations, in favour of concealing the evidence of their sponsorship of terrorism, obfuscating facts and distorting narratives at regional and global forums.

In the light of increased terrorist activities around the world, the time has come to openly debate the regional State sponsorship of terror outfits exported to our country and let the world know more about its behaviour. The Kabul Process is not just about outreach to the Taliban; it is about ending the conflict, achieving peace and preserving the democratic order, for which numerous Afghans and allies have sacrificed their lives. Moreover, the Taliban should not be permitted to misuse the opportunity they have been presented, as they have done in the past.

As we grapple with security challenges, we are working to achieve the important objectives stipulated in the agreement that founded the National Unity Government of Afghanistan, witnessed and welcomed by the international community. That is essential for our national unity and political stability, as it is for the success of our new peace plan. The effort is carried out within the parameters of a broad-based dialogue with a view to advancing the national interests of Afghanistan, in conformity with the spirit of our Constitution. Our overall objective is to advance national unity and strengthen social cohesion and inclusivity to achieve a just and peaceful society, fully grounded in the rule of law, where our youth can fulfil their national aspirations. We are confident that our efforts will soon yield positive outcomes.

On today's special occasion, I reaffirm the National Unity Government's commitment to empowering the role of women in all facets of our society and politics. Ms. Sarabi's briefing offered a clear perspective on progress made in terms of the benchmarks of our national strategy, resolution 1325 (2000) and the challenges ahead of us. We now have female ministers, deputy ministers, members of Parliament, peacemakers, civil society activists and ambassadors serving as proactive agents for the development of Afghanistan. Two weeks ago, at a historic event, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah represented Afghanistan at the inaugural session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. That symbolized Afghanistan's overall commitment to the principles of universal human rights. Despite progress, we know that our achievements in the area of the promotion and protection of human rights need to be consolidated as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General with regard to civilian casualties documented by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which I mentioned earlier.

Against all odds, Afghanistan has progressed steadily on the path of economic cooperation, increased regional connectivity and shared prosperity. We have expanded multidimensional relations with our Central

Asian neighbours, thereby resulting in numerous agreements in the areas of trade, connectivity and economic cooperation. The inauguration of Afghanistan's segment of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline in Herat by President Ghani and leaders and senior officials of Pakistan, Turkmenistan and India, following more than a decade of preparatory work, has generated new incentives for cooperation and opportunities for fostering mutual trust and confidence. Additionally, other regional projects aim to boost productivity and economic cooperation for common gains. We are looking forward to the forthcoming ministerial conference on Afghanistan to be held in Tashkent.

We wish to expand relations with all partners, including the United Nations. We are grateful for the crucial assistance role of UNAMA, which has been a catalyst for bringing change to the lives of our people. We welcome the renewal of UNAMA's mandate through the adoption of resolution 2405 (2018) and underscore once again the imperative of implementing the one United Nations approach for achieving optimum efficiency and coherence. Let me reconvey our appreciation for the dedicated efforts and leadership of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto — a dear friend.

Combating the illicit network of narcotics, money-laundering, and terrorism finance remains a key priority for us. Based on our national drug action plan, we have continued eradication operations, and opiate seizures have reached their highest levels since 2012. We will continue to increase cooperation with our allies to strengthen the relevant law enforcement agencies, foster greater intelligence-sharing and set up effective mechanisms to curtail drug trafficking.

Additionally, refugee repatriation from neighbouring countries remains operational. We are working in close collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to provide assistance and much needed services to that vulnerable group. We call for continued international support for the joint humanitarian response plan for the period from 2018 to 2021, which requires $437 million for 2018 to assist 2.8 million people in need. However, security and durable peace are fundamental solutions to addressing that humanitarian challenge, and require comprehensive national, regional, and global commitment and action.

Lastly, in two weeks's time, 21 March will mark the beginning of Nowruz — the Afghan New Year. We are beginning this new spring season with hope, determination and confidence. As international pressure to address the root causes of violence in our country intensifies, our defence and security forces stand as capable as ever to protect and defend Afghanistan against international terrorism. Given that, we have taken a historic step towards the restoration of durable peace in our country. In that light, we look to our international partners, including the Council, to remain at our side in that endeavour.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

We are discussing the situation in Afghanistan on an important historic day. On this day 110 years ago, 15,000 female workers marched through the city of New York demanding their rights. It is therefore a particular honour for me to speak before the Security Council today, which marks International Women's Day.

For a long time, the Council has been attentive to women and peace and security. On 31 October 2000, the Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000) on that very subject. The Netherlands was then, too, a non-permanent member of the Council, and we contributed actively to its adoption (see S/PV.4213). The resolution is a political framework, thereby making clear that without women, peace will not stand a chance or thrive. It is a also clear acknowledgement of how women and girls often suffer and are particularly vulnerable in times of war and conflict, but it is also concerns their role, leadership and responsibility in bringing about lasting peace.

Every country was encouraged to draw up a national action plan. A minority of 73 countries has done so, including, notably, Afghanistan with its very active Afghan women leaders' network. Worldwide, however, a great gap remains to bridge between the norms established for women and the bitter reality that women face, especially, but not only, in conflict situations. There continues to be an overwhelming lack of negotiations in which women play a meaningful part, let alone a leadership role, but resolution 1325 (2000) is not only about political participation or representation. It is also about the protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, especially in conflict situations. That is the responsibility of us all — not only that of Member States, the United Nations and

non-governmental organizations, but of citizens in general. There should be no room for complacency, let alone impunity. There must be zero tolerance in every situation regardless of the circumstances.

For women in Afghanistan, there are also rays of hope. In the days of Queen Soraya, in 1919, Afghan women were allowed to vote significantly earlier than in many other countries. In modern-day Afghanistan, First Lady Rula Ghani successfully has advocated for women's rights. We hear of female judges and women in Government as ministers, deputy ministers, parliamentarians, and female police officers as was mentioned earlier. From 2013 to 2017, the female literacy rate nearly doubled. Statistics, however, also show that much remains to be achieved, especially for women and girls in rural areas.

The courageous filmmaker Roya Sadat sold her wedding jewellery and an apartment to make a movie that speaks to gender inequality and specifically brings the issue of violence against women into the open, which was a courageous decision. The brave women in the film show us that with perseverance and will power almost anything is possible. For many Afghan women, however, their own situation remains too dire to overcome by themselves. Facing violence, exclusion and discrimination, they will continue to need our support and helping hand in pursuit of needed assistance.

It is clear that many positive changes, some of which were mentioned earlier this morning, have taken place in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime. At the same time, many of the reforms remain vulnerable, occasionally fragile and by no means irreversible. As we all know, Afghanistan continues to face many problems, including high levels of violence, violent attacks, poverty, corruption, discrimination and, above all, the lack of opportunities for young people — the new generation. Therefore, as we have just renewed UNAMA's mandate through the unanimous adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), I should like to offer a couple of recommendations.

First, we can build peace only through inclusive negotiations led by an inclusive Afghan Government. The right instrument — the Kabul Process — is in place. It is both Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, and it is a peace and reconciliation mechanism. It deserves our support. Last week's gesture for peace made by the Afghan Government at the second Kabul Process conference was an important step in the right direction. The message is clear. The Afghans are taking the lead, and we will continue to support them. Afghanistan needs a functioning security apparatus and a workable and inclusive peace deal. That is no small task, and it will require continued political courage, perseverance and assistance.

Secondly, the international community should focus its energy on supporting the peace talks. Clearly, the solution has to be political. It will not be possible without true commitment and constructive engagement from all regional partners, and donor countries should be expected to unify their efforts in this regard. All too often, donors — and here we have to look at ourselves — have parallel and sometimes conflicting goals or objectives. Yet there is an obvious solution: for the Afghan Government to set the priorities and UNAMA to coordinate the One United Nations response effectively, inclusively and efficiently.

Thirdly, for Afghanistan to emerge sustainably from conflict, there is a need for a truly integrated approach, one that strengthens coherence between all sectors: political, security, development and human rights, central to all endeavours. This requires creative thinking, including in and by the United Nations system, supported first and foremost by the Security Council, but also the Member States. We should work jointly in the prevention of conflict and in support of durable peace and inclusive prosperity.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands will remain a reliable and constructive partner for Afghanistan, focused not only on the security sector but also more broadly, and we have done so for 17 years. We strongly support the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, and we will live up to our promise to allocate 50 per cent of our support on budget, in close cooperation with other partners.

Having said all this, I will now conclude. The progress made in Afghanistan over the past 17 years is impressive. I commend the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and the outstanding efforts and hard work of his team. I also very much welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to host the ministerial conference on Afghanistan in Geneva on 28 November. I am confident that the Council will continue to support Afghan-led efforts to achieve peace, bring about and nurture stability, and reinforce inclusive, rights-based development in Afghanistan, a process that should be

aimed particularly at achieving all gender objectives and goals.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Söder (Sweden): Madam President, I wish to thank you for having convened today's briefing on Afghanistan, with a necessary focus, on International Women's Day, on women and peace and security.

The correlation between gender equality and peaceful societies is clear. Afghanistan will not achieve the peace and development that its people so strongly desire without unleashing and embracing the agency of Afghan women.

I align myself with the statement to be made later on behalf of the European Union and its member States. I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing and to express appreciation for the very important interventions by Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi.

Sweden is a long-term donor to Afghanistan. We were a participant in the Resolute Support Mission, and we follow developments very closely. Today I will dedicate my intervention to women's issues. That does not mean that the other aspects of the very difficult situation in Afghanistan are forgotten.

While there have been genuine improvements in women's enjoyment of their human rights over the past 15 years, more is needed, as Afghan women continue to seek to play their role in society. This is a particularly critical moment for women's participation in shaping the future of Afghanistan.

As the country prepares for elections in 2018 and 2019, we expect the Government and the electoral management bodies to take all steps necessary to develop and implement gender-sensitive security and election plans, so as to enable an environment in which both women and men can safely run for elected office, campaign freely and vote, not least in remote and rural districts.

Let me commend the Government's continued efforts to realize its vision for peace. This is essential given that, as we have heard, violence by terrorist groups must be stopped, and the solution to the conflict can only be political. We commend the hosting of the second meeting of the Kabul Process last week. During the meeting, the Government presented a constructive road map for peace. We call on the Taliban to engage in a dialogue on the road map. In order to ensure the legitimacy of the peace process, it must be inclusive and uphold all of the achievements made over the past decades. Regional actors are expected to make their contribution to the peace endeavours. This is decisive in the fight against terrorism and in breaking the vicious circle.

In each of our Council meetings, we must reflect on how the women and peace and security agenda translates into real change. We must build on the knowledge that the slogan "more women, more peace" is certainly true. On the basis of the principles of our feminist foreign policy, we want to highlight the "four R's": rights, representation, resources and a reality check. I would like to briefly highlight four areas in which increased efforts could make a real difference for Afghan women.

First, it is about safe access to health care and education.

Secondly, it is about investing in women, not least in the national action plan on women and peace and security, in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000).

Thirdly, violence against Afghan women and girls is a grave violation of their human rights and must be ended. In this regard, Sweden supports Women for Afghan Women, which works to fight gender-based violence with shelters, family counselling and mediation.

Fourthly, women should be present across the whole of Afghan society. We are encouraged by the improved gender equality in business, civil society, the civil service, the judiciary, the police and the army. Women should never have to fear making their contribution to society.

Today's briefers, Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi, have devoted much of their professional lives to women's participation. They have demonstrated that Afghanistan does not lack strong female leaders; yet they are not often enough at the table when decisions about peace and security are being made. Sweden will continue our dialogue and mediation training of local female actors to build their capacity to lead in local peace and reconciliation efforts.

Let me commend the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as penholder, on today's adoption of resolution 2405 (2018) and for the constructive manner in which it conducted the negotiations. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) plays a critical role in support of national efforts towards a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. This is also true of women's roles and for the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000).

The Council now need to back up and support UNAMA as it carries out its work at this critical time. The renewed mandate must now also be backed up with adequate and sustainable resources in order for the Mission to fulfil its mandate.

After years of conflict and violence, Afghanistan has reached yet another milestone. Elections are around the corner, and the outlines of a path to peace are on the table.

The potential for peace must be fully realized with the meaningful participation of Afghan women.

Ms. Andreyeva (United Kingdom): I would like to pay tribute to my Dutch colleagues for their tireless efforts to reach a consensus on the important resolution 2405 (2018), adopted today. I would also like to thank all of our briefers and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Yamamoto, for his briefing and for his and his team's continued efforts in challenging circumstances.

I am delighted to share the Chamber with so many women on International Women's Day. I am especially pleased that we are discussing Afghanistan today, as I had the privilege to spend several years in Afghanistan working to support education for Afghan girls and a future in Parliament for Afghan women. As Ms. Safi and Ms. Sarabi have demonstrated in their briefings and their own impressive work, women have a vital role to play in securing Afghanistan's future, and we should all stand beside them. Afghanistan cannot find lasting peace with only half its population. The United Nations must maintain a strong role in promoting and protecting the rights of women across Afghanistan and continue to support the Afghan Government in implementing its national action plan on women and peace and security.

Ensuring accountability and equal access to justice for all are essential to long-term peace and stability. We welcome the adoption of Afghanistan's revised penal code and the clarity it brings. We encourage the Government of Afghanistan to ensure its full implementation in line with the law on the elimination of violence against women, which we hope will continue to be used to guarantee Afghan women the protection and accountability they deserve.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is an essential mechanism in supporting Afghanistan's recovery from conflict. The continued presence of UNAMA and the resolve, resourcefulness and skill with which its staff support the Afghan people are a strong signal of the international community's commitment.

The United Kingdom welcomes the Secretary-General's decision to host a ministerial conference on Afghanistan in Geneva on 28 November. Implementing the findings of the strategic review and the Secretary-General's report of August 2017 (S/2017/696) will allow UNAMA to be as efficient as possible and to adapt as circumstances change. I am pleased to see that this is reflected in resolution 2405 (2018), adopted today, and I hope it will send a strong signal to the Mission's hard-working personnel that we fully support them.

UNAMA's mandate to support peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan remains at the core of the Mission. That will be delivered sustainably only through a credible, inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process where all Afghan citizens, whatever their background, can resolve grievances through dialogue. Of course, for peace to be sustainable it must be inclusive. The sharp focus on the involvement of women in peace and security in this mandate renewal is particularly welcome.

With inclusiveness in mind, we highly commend the bold offer laid out by President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and Afghanistan's National Unity Government at the recent meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation. We welcome the credibility, flexibility and openness of the offer, which gives the Taliban the opportunity to be part of a political process towards peace. While the Council was not able to reflect those recent developments in the mandate renewal, I hope we will find another opportunity to endorse it and to lend our full support to those Afghan-led efforts.

Finally, the United Nations must play a strong role in supporting free and fair elections. Elections, both this year and next, are an opportunity for the nation

to communicate its aspirations to the political parties. Those elections are a crucial point at which political trust can be renewed and stability forged. We commend the progress made by Afghanistan's Independent Electoral Commission towards electoral reform and we encourage it to redouble its efforts to ensure that voter registration is completed according to agreed timelines. We hope that UNAMA will support those efforts fully.

In conclusion, we fully support UNAMA, and we welcome the renewal of its mandate today. As a Council, we have collectively endorsed the importance of inclusion, including of women, and of upholding and promoting human rights. We call on all parties to engage meaningfully in a political process to bring lasting peace and stability to the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to welcome you to New York, Madam President, and thank you for presiding over today's open debate.

Today marks International Women's Day. At the outset, I would like to extend to you, Madam President, and the other female colleagues present my greetings for the holiday. On this special occasion, we must remember the female Blue Helmets who are serving the peacekeeping cause. As the Council knows, when Chinese people strive for a better life, women hold up half of the sky. Chinese women are contributing to world peace. At this very moment, in Juba, South Sudan, 14 female peacekeepers are working hard in the infantry, under the leadership of their team leader, to help women and children. I would like to take this opportunity to convey to them and all female peacekeepers my highest regards.

I would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing and thank Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi for their presentations. China listened attentively to the statement made by the representative of Afghanistan.

Peace and stability in Afghanistan have a direct bearing on the well-being of the Afghan people, as well as on security, stability and prosperity in the region. The international community should continue to provide robust support to Afghanistan to respond to challenges in the political, economic and security fields. As a traditionally friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China supports the country in achieving peace, security, stability and development as soon as possible. Afghanistan is an important country on the route of the Belt and Road Initiative. Resolution 2405 (2018), which was just adopted by the Council, once again pointed out that all parties should take advantage of the One Belt One Road Initiative to promote economic development and regional cooperation in Afghanistan and help Afghanistan achieve stability and prosperity and should make concerted efforts to create a community of shared future for humankind through dialogue and coordination. In accordance with the provisions set out in the relevant Council resolutions, China will continue to work with all parties to help Afghanistan take advantage of its comparative advantages at the national level, participate in regional economic cooperation and connectivity and achieve economic and social development.

Advancing national reconciliation is the fundamental way to resolve the question of Afghanistan. China strongly supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and reconciliation. We commend the Afghan Government for its efforts to promote peace talks. We also support the Afghan Government in unveiling its reconciliation plan as soon as possible and reaching agreement on national reconciliation with armed rebel groups, including the Taliban, and launching the peace process.

China actively participated in the international meeting on the Kabul Process in February. We will continue to make unremitting efforts to push forward the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. We stand ready to join the international community to create a favourable external environment for peace talks between the Government and the Taliban and contribute to achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Improving the security situation serves as a basis for achieving stability in Afghanistan. China supports the country in strengthening capacity-building in the security sector. We have taken an active part in regional counter-terrorism cooperation. In November 2017 China, Afghanistan and Pakistan held trilateral Vice-Foreign Minister consultations on countering terrorism. We are now consulting on a trilateral memorandum of understanding on counter-terrorism and cooperation.

In December 2017 China hosted the first Foreign Ministers dialogue with Afghanistan and Pakistan. We are ready to continue to take advantage of mechanisms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Afghanistan contact group, engage with countries of the region, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, combat

terrorism, address threats from terrorism and safeguard regional peace and stability.

Finally, I would like to point out that China commends the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on its work and supports its positive role in helping Afghanistan to promote a political process that safeguards national security, fosters economic development, enhances its governance capacity and provides support to the upcoming Afghan parliamentary and district council elections. China will continue to support UNAMA and Special Representative Yamamoto in their efforts.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Madam President, for convening today's meeting. We also thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing on the situation in Afghanistan.

We welcome in particular Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands. We salute all women on International Women's Day and reiterate our commitment to the Security Council's women and peace and security agenda. It promotes the protection of women in situations of conflict and during humanitarian crises, their empowerment and their participation in peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts. We thank Mrs. Habiba Sarabi and Ms. Mariam Safi for their briefings and for their efforts in support of women's rights and participation and their leadership on the path to lasting peace in the country.

During the Council's visit to Afghanistan in January, we were able to see the commendable efforts of the Government, the First Lady of Afghanistan and women's organizations to promote peace and stability. As we renew the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), we would like to acknowledge its efforts in support of Afghan women. Similarly, we would like to recognize the efforts of the Netherlands as penholder to strengthen its mandate in support of the national plan on women and peace and security and to highlight the importance of funding its implementation.

Peru pays close attention to, and is concerned about, developments in Afghanistan. We must condemn ongoing violence committed by terrorists, in particular the recent attacks in Kabul and Jalalabad, and extend sympathy and solidarity to the victims. We believe that it is crucial to investigate and punish according to the rule of law and due process all terrorist acts and activities. The Taliban, including the Haqqani Network, Al-Qaida and Da'esh, must be held accountable for the crimes they commit. We also believe that it is important to strengthen efforts to address corruption and pay special attention to illicit drug trafficking. In many cases, such scourges benefit terrorist groups, undermine institutions and weaken the social fabric of the country.

Given the clear deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan, we highlight the importance of preserving stability in order to make headway in fostering political dialogue and national reconciliation, holding inclusive elections in 2018 and 2019 and achieving lasting peace. Peru supports the Kabul Process, which was developed and led by Afghans, and supports greater participation from women and young people. We welcome efforts to begin peace negotiations. We hope that the counterparts will commit in good faith to the process of reconciliation.

We would like to underscore the importance of international, regional and bilateral support and cooperation for the Afghan process. We highlight in particular the efforts of UNAMA and the support of Central Asian States, as well as the initiative put forward by the People's Republic of China to establish a trilateral dialogue with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In conclusion, as we celebrate women and their struggle, we would like to underscore the words of Secretary-General António Guterres: women's participation makes peace agreements stronger, societies more resilient and economies more vigorous.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/165) on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing. As we mark International Women's Day, reflecting on the important role of women in peace and development and in the overall political process in Afghanistan and elsewhere in our debate today makes it all the more timely and relevant.

We thank the Dutch presidency for taking this initiative and we are pleased to see you, Madam Minister, personally presiding over today's debate. We thank Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, and Ms. Mariam

Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for their briefings.

Afghanistan still faces multiple and complex challenges to its security, stability and development. Its people continue to pay a heavy price because of the instability and violence affecting the country. As the report of the Secretary-General highlights, it is particularly women and children who constitute the most vulnerable segments of the society.

We take note of the efforts being exerted by the Government to improve the plight of Afghan women, including by implementing the law on the elimination of violence against women, as well as upholding resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. As highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General, we believe the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security will go a long way in promoting the full and effective participation of Afghan women in the country's peace and reconciliation endeavours.

Once again, we take this opportunity to express our sympathy and solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan following the loss of innocent lives, including women and children, as a result of the recent suicide attacks in Kabul and Jalalabad. We hope those who committed those atrocious crimes will be held to account.

No doubt, the long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can be ensured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation and political process. In that regard, the renewed call made by the Afghan Government for unconditional peace talks with the Taliban and the outlining of a framework for peace presented at the second conference of the Kabul Process are encouraging. We fully support the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process and appreciate the Government's offer for peace with the Taliban. We hope the Taliban will respond positively to that call and engage in direct talks with the Government with a view to achieving a political settlement and restoring lasting peace and security in Afghanistan. The support of regional and international stakeholders is key to the success of the peace process. We welcome the declaration adopted on 28 February, which reiterates the support of the international community to the Kabul Process for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process and reaffirms the commitment to the necessary fight against terrorism in order to bring about lasting peace, security, stability and prosperity to Afghanistan.

With regard to the political situation in the country, the tension between the Presidential Palace and Jamiat-e-Islami is a matter of concern, which could potentially undermine the National Unity Government and upset the already fragile political arrangement, as the report of the Secretary-General notes. We hope that the parties will resolve the dispute peacefully and expeditiously and redirect their efforts towards addressing the multiple challenges facing Afghanistan.

The holding of peaceful and democratic parliamentary and district council elections within the set time frame is indeed very important, and we note that some progress has been made in preparation for the elections. Accelerating such efforts and building the confidence of the Afghan people in the electoral process through the involvement and participation of all the relevant stakeholders will be key to ensuring the timely and successful holding of the elections.

Without sustained and inclusive economic growth and development, the peace and security challenges faced by Afghanistan cannot be effectively addressed. That is why the Unity Government needs the coordinated and comprehensive support of the international community to advance its political reform and national development priorities, as envisaged in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. It is vital that the international community sustain its engagement and deliver on its various commitments in that regard.

Given all the points I mentioned, the efforts of UNAMA in promoting and in supporting the initiatives for peace talks, reconciliation, dialogue and support for social and economic development, with full respect for the country's sovereignty and leadership, remain very important. We therefore welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), which renews the mandate of UNAMA for another year.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Allow me to start by thanking you, Madam President, for presiding over today's meeting. We greatly appreciate it. I would also like to commend the Kingdom of the Netherlands for its efforts as penholder in today's adoption of resolution 2405 (2018). I appreciate the presence of our briefers: Special Representative Yamamoto, Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi. Their briefings described many positive

developments, and we should continue along those lines. Allow me to share some of Poland's thoughts.

Poland strongly supports the fundamental role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and its personnel in supporting Afghan society, promoting and monitoring human rights, encouraging peace and reconciliation and providing valuable assistance to the Government of Afghanistan. I would like to align myself with the statement of the European Union (EU), to be delivered later.

We welcome the Kabul Process on peace and security cooperation as a prospective framework, bringing together a number of regional and international participants, including the United Nations and the EU. We believe that the initiative will give new impetus to the efforts and lead to a peaceful and prompt settlement of the conflict. In that context, following consultation, of course, with the female members of the High Peace Council, we call on the Afghan Government to put in place clear procedures for how to engage and to include women in peace negotiations with the Taliban and other parties to the conflict.

The fight against the Taliban greatly affects women, since they make up 12 per cent of the conflict-related civilian casualties. Consequently, it is women's rights that are violated the most by the presence of the Taliban in communities. At the same time, women frequently have better access to certain populations and locations and can gather critical information about threats to security. They can also improve the relationship of the security forces with local communities and can detect early signs of radicalization, since they are often the first targets of fundamentalists. However, Afghan women do not have a significant role in decision-making, including on how to combat the Taliban at the local and national levels. We appreciate the fact that the percentage of women in the High Peace Council has increased to 20 per cent, including at a senior level and in the provincial peace committees across the 34 provinces of Afghanistan. However, women's voices are missing in the actual talks and negotiations.

While we recognize the Afghan Government's efforts to strengthen the engagement of women in the police and security sectors, many challenges remain in that area. Further work is needed to develop clear procedures on how to increase the number of women in the leadership and management of the security sector. The process cannot happen without the active participation of civil society organizations led by women. In that connection, we recognize the important role played by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and other United Nations entities in supporting the empowerment of Afghan women. Moreover, we would like to take this opportunity to highlight the positive impact and ongoing significance of the international commitments made at the NATO Warsaw Summit in 2016 and its important influence on security, development and stability in Afghanistan.

The protection of civilians and compliance with the obligations under international humanitarian law remain a serious problem, causing innocent people to suffer the effects of the military conflict in Afghanistan. As the 2017 annual report on the issue showed, there is still significant room for progress. Poland strongly supports the efforts of UNAMA to limit civilian casualties, in particular among children, who are severely affected by unexploded ordnance.

The upcoming parliamentary and district council elections represent a significant task for the Afghan political system on its path to an inclusive and transparent outcome. Poland hopes that the new Parliament will create a strong legislative foundation for the sustainable development of the country. In terms of technical support, we encourage UNAMA to provide the necessary assistance at the request of the Afghan authorities. The broad participation of women, both as candidates and as voters, remains a high priority for us.

In conclusion, I would like once again to commend the work of UNAMA, and in particular Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My country appreciates your effective presence, Madam President, in presiding over the meeting today, which is International Women's Day. We also welcome the presence of Ms. Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, and Ms. Annika Söder, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, at the meeting this morning.

My delegation thanks Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA), for the quality of his briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, and Ms. Mariam Safi, Executive Director of the

Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for the relevance of their interventions and for their ongoing commitment to making women's voices heard in the democratic process in which their country is engaged.

Côte d'Ivoire deplores and condemns the wave of violence and the series of deadly attacks recently endured by Afghanistan. The three attacks that took place between 20 and 27 January in Kabul and Jalalabad call on us all to push the Council to pay sustained attention to the situation in the country, given its impact on the stability of the entire region.

Despite the worrisome security situation, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the holding, on 28 February in Kabul, of the second conference of the Kabul Process on peace and reconciliation as an important step on the path to peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. My country sees President Ashraf Ghani's extended hand to the Taliban as a decisive step towards frank negotiations between his Government and the Taliban. Côte d'Ivoire remains confident that this offer of peace will lead to the establishment of a genuine inclusive peace process.

We should also like to see an assessment of the progress made in the area of peace and joint measures to combat terrorism in Afghanistan and the region. In that regard, my country encourages Afghan stakeholders to engage in an open dialogue, based on the achievements of the 2004 Constitution, including respect for the rights of citizens, especially those of women. Notwithstanding the sense of hope emanating from the second meeting of the Kabul Process, my delegation remains concerned by the persistence of some political tensions in the country. It therefore urges the parties to prioritize dialogue in the interest of the Afghan people.

On the occasion of the celebration of International Women's Day, aimed at promoting women's rights and the fight against inequality, Côte d'Ivoire would like to pay a warm tribute to Afghan women for their important contribution to the process of reconciliation and peace efforts in their country in a sometimes difficult socio-political context, in which the debate on the place of women in society remains a particularly sensitive subject.

My country calls on the international community and our Council to give Afghan women the necessary means to consolidate their place in society and promote their participation in regional and international initiatives for peace, while strengthening the protection of their most basic rights. To that end, my delegation welcomes the adoption of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Afghan Government's July 2015 launch of a national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. Côte d'Ivoire calls for the establishment of a financing mechanism for the plan in order to give Afghan women their rightful place in their country's consolidation of democratic institutions.

In conclusion, my delegation urges the international community to support the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to restore lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I thank you very much, Minister Kaag, for using the occasion of International Women's Day to highlight the critical importance of including women in Afghanistan's political process. In addition, it is truly a pleasure to see you, Madam, presiding over the Security Council today on behalf of the Netherlands. I am inspired as I look around the Council table at the women leaders you have assembled for this discussion, and I hope this will serve as a reminder that we all need to do more to ensure that women are fully represented and empowered in efforts to promote peace and security in the field.

I thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and continued leadership, as well as all the efforts of his team in support of peace and economic development in Afghanistan in a very challenging environment. We again express appreciation for the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/696) on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) last year. We welcome the adoption today of resolution 2405 (2018), renewing UNAMA's mandate and endorsing the strategic review's findings and recommendations. We are confident that this will enable UNAMA to pursue its work as effectively and efficiently as possible, and we look forward to the Secretary-General implementing the strategic review recommendations as quickly as possible.

I would also like to thank Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi for sharing their perspectives on the important work they do in engaging women in Afghanistan's political process and society in general. I will comment more on that later.

The United States commends Afghanistan's leaders for taking a courageous stance at the Kabul

Process conference last week. They reaffirmed their clear commitment to peace and their willingness to engage. The onus is now on the Taliban to return that commitment and to demonstrate that it is ready to talk. The message in Kabul was clear. The door to peace is open; the Taliban must choose to walk through that door. The United States position, as outlined in our South Asia strategy, is unambiguous — the only way to end the conflict is through a negotiated settlement. We reaffirm our commitment to supporting direct negotiations between the Afghan Government and the Taliban.

The Afghan people today are ready for peace. They understand that a peace agreement will require compromise on both sides, but they will not sacrifice their safety, legal protections or human rights to achieve peace. They will not return to the oppression and isolation of the late 1990s. The Taliban has an obligation to explain how it fits into the rapidly advancing Afghan society, where Afghan men and women are free to speak their minds, choose their leaders and help shape Government reforms. Groups and countries that provide the Taliban and another armed insurgents with weapons, money or political support are only fuelling the conflict and the environment that allows terrorism to persist and grow. We cannot be successful if the status quo is allowed to continue. We renew our call on Afghanistan's neighbours to join our efforts to bring a resolution to the conflict.

In addition to the contribution of the Kabul Process to achieving peace at the national level, it is also critically important that we continue to support the role of civil society in building and strengthening consensus for the peace process across all elements of Afghan society. International Women's Day provides us with a welcome occasion to emphasize those efforts. Ms. Sarabi's initiative with Afghanistan's re-energized High Peace Council, which established a network of women in provincial capitals to foster reconciliation, has the potential to build broad-based support for peace.

During the Security Council visit to Afghanistan in January, Ambassador Haley was encouraged by the discussions with Afghan officials on the status of women in Afghanistan. We urge the Government to continue to promote the growing role of women in Afghan society and Afghanistan's peace and political process, including as active participants in Afghanistan's upcoming elections, both as voters and candidates. The United States fully supports timely, credible and transparent elections for Afghanistan's Parliament in 2018 and President in 2019. Only the Afghan people can choose the leaders that will represent them and work together to create and sustain the conditions for peace. Those elections will be vital in the pursuit of political stability in Afghanistan.

To conclude, we are encouraged by the signs of progress we see in Afghanistan and by the brave efforts of the Afghan Government. We remain committed to supporting that progress, including through the work of the Council.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by welcoming Her Excellency Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Acting Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands. We all welcome your presence in the Chamber, Madam President. I also congratulate the Netherlands for having chosen to convene a debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) today on 8 March, International Women's Day. The Government of Equatorial Guinea expresses to everyone its most heartfelt gratitude and congratulations for the magnanimous initiative of occupying today, International Women's Day for working women, this Chamber of entrepreneurial women, whose mere attendance motivates me to send a message to all of the Government and the leaders of the world, especially the Government of Afghanistan: if we women can be sitting here today, the women of Afghanistan can too.

I also wish to convey our thanks to Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, for the comprehensive and detailed annual briefing on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Afghanistan. I also thank Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of the Afghan High Peace Council, and Ms. Mariam Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for their invaluable briefings in the Chamber on the situation of Afghan women.

Today we wholeheartedly celebrate 8 March, an important day for all women of the world, as it seeks to achieve gender equality and to empower women and girls — as yet unfulfilled tasks of our era and the greatest human rights challenge worldwide. Secretary-Genera Antônio Guterres affirms that idea in his 2018 message about this important day. He also stated that today we have the opportunity to transform impulse

into action in order to empower women in all contexts and, above all, to pay tribute to women activists who work tirelessly to champion women's rights and to encourage women to reach their full potential.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea, by supporting the renewal of UNAMA's mandate, fully recognizes and duly appreciates the crucial role of the Mission and of all United Nations agencies in backing the people of Afghanistan, in promoting peace and reconciliation, in ensuring and promoting human rights, in helping to improve the credibility, integrity, inclusivity and sustainability of electoral processes, and in improving the coordination of assistance of the international community in Afghanistan.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/165) indicates that the number of civilians that have lost their lives has decreased by 9 per cent as compared to 2016. Nevertheless, we are concerned because we continue to see appalling statistics of civilian deaths and wounded in 2017 and in 2018 thus far. We are troubled that the rate at which women are killed or injured is on the rise and that grave injuries are inflicted on civilians by constant suicide bombs attacks and other attacks with improvised explosive devices, which disproportionately affect women, boys and girls. Attacks on public places, as we witnessed in the attacks carried out in January, are particularly unsettling. As such, we call on all parties to the conflict to take all the necessary measures to protect the civilian population, especially women and children, in line with international humanitarian law and the basic norms of human rights.

Sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls in Afghanistan continues to be a global concern. Although sexual and gender-based violence, including the practice of bacha bazi, has been outlawed, such crimes regrettably continue to be committed without adequate legal remedy. The entry into force of the criminal code is a step forward, but we urge the Afghan Government to ensure its implementation, as well as the enforcement and compliance with the law on the elimination of violence against women.

The Government of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the ongoing efforts of the Afghan Government to seek appropriate strategies to put an end to the violence and to forge sustainable peace. Evidence of such efforts is the call of the Government on 28 February to initiate peace talks with the Taliban, thereby attempting to establish a framework for peace in the second conference of the Kabul Process for peace and security. Resolution 2344 (2017), adopted by the Council on 17 March 2017 (see S/PV.7902), seeks to support the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and the fulfilment of the commitments pledged in the London, Kabul, Bonn and Tokyo Conferences in order to strengthen governance and the rule of law, among other things. The resolution also urges UNAMA to collaborate in the implementation of the constitutional provisions and international treaties on the full enjoyment of the rights of women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as to support Government efforts to ensuring an inclusive electoral process, including measures to allow the full and safe participation of women.

While the proportion of women on the High Peace Council rose from 9 to 20 per cent, including at its highest levels, it is also true and regrettable that in real conversations, including during the Kabul Process last year and in talks in Muscat, no women attended. As a result, our delegation urges the Government of Afghanistan to ensure that in upcoming dialogues and conversations on peace and security, women participate actively and that they be optimally represented in all State institutions and have a significant role in political decision-making — as is the case in the policies of the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Mr. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that we must all take advantage of the opportunities we have before us in all contexts to add our grain of sand in order to transform the lives of women wherever they are. Now is the crucial moment to seek gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to transform the lives of Afghan women in all of its dimensions and manifestations. That is why our delegation calls upon the Government of Afghanistan and UNAMA to continue its work and to actively follow up to ensure the effective implementation of the national action plan on women, peace and security through the establishment, in due course, of strategies and mechanisms to finance the plan's budget.

John F. Kennedy said,

> "I do not say that all men are equal in their ability, character and motivation. I do say that every[one] should be given a fair chance to develop all the talents he may have."

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): It is symbolic that you are presiding over the Security Council's meeting on International Women's Day, Madam President, and we congratulate you and all the women of the world on this holiday. We remember your Permanent Representative's appeal for seeing as many women as possible at today's meeting, and we can see evidence of that in this Chamber. The absence of women in my delegation in no way signifies disrespect, let alone dislike. In Russia 8 March is an official holiday. Today all our women have the day off, and we are working for them.

We would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto for his thorough report on the current state of affairs in Afghanistan and Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi for their interesting briefings. For our part, we would like to make the following comments.

We are still very concerned about the security situation in Afghanistan. The Security Council's mission to Kabul confirmed the fact that the situation on that front continues to be very difficult. Towards the end of January, unfortunately, the country was rocked by a series of bloody terrorist attacks that took the lives of around 200 Afghan civilians and injured more than 400. The various terrorist organizations have not slowed down. Their terrorist activity continues, they are mounting systematic attacks in various parts of the country and they have maintained full or partial control of a significant percentage of its territory.

One of the serious factors in the deterioration of the situation is the activity of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Jihadists are consistently adding to the numbers of militants in the north of Afghanistan, turning the region into a springboard for further expansion, including into Central Asia. One particularly alarming phenomenon is ISIL's establishment in Afghanistan of an impressive network of militant training camps, whose trainees include citizens of Central Asian States and Russia. It is regrettable that there has still been no investigation of the fact that unmarked helicopters are transporting ISIL members and supplying them with weapons in the north of Afghanistan. This problem cannot be ignored. The situation should be thoroughly investigated and this practice ended immediately. Clearing the country's northern regions of terrorist elements will need far more decisive measures.

We supported resolution 2405 (2018), proposed by the Netherlands, on extending the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), taking into account the importance of the United Nations presence there. The Mission does a great deal for the country, but it is by definition incapable of being a panacea for all of Afghanistan's problems. We hope the resolution will improve its effectiveness. It is nonetheless regrettable that during the agreement on the text a number of the Russian delegation's key concerns were ignored, particularly those relating to ISIL's strengthening of its positions in Afghanistan, which I just mentioned. As experience has shown, attempts to minimize the scale of these problems can have disastrous consequences.

The terrorist threat and the narcotics problem are inextricably linked. Drugs represent a significant financial source for Afghan terrorists. According to the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, last year there was a significant increase — more than 60 per cent — in the area under drug cultivation in Afghanistan, and opium production increased by more than 80 per cent, reaching a record level, including in the northern provinces. The drug trade also continues to be a serious problem in Afghanistan itself and in its neighbours. We urge the military presences there to give greater attention to this issue, including by cooperating with regional organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). We should remember that the Kanal operation, conducted under the auspices of the CSTO, has been blocking Afghan drug-smuggling routes since 2003, and thanks to it, hundreds of tons of illegally trafficked drugs and thousands of firearms have been seized. Law-enforcement agencies from more than 20 states and many international organizations worked together to make it happen.

The fact unfortunately remains that the prolonged, large-scale presence of foreign contingents in Afghanistan has not led to an improvement in the military and political situation. Moreover, the expansion of the authority of foreign military personnel has brought an increase in civilian casualties, and there is data on this in United Nations reports. We believe that putting the emphasis on force alone is a mistake. We see no alternatives to a political process aimed at achieving sustainable national reconciliation, and if that process is going to be effective, it should be inclusive.

Attempts to marginalize specific countries in the region are counterproductive. The outside stakeholders should encourage a culture of good neighbourliness and cooperation, and an understanding of the importance of the regional dimension of the Afghan settlement.

We believe firmly that the key to stabilization in Afghanistan resides in negotiation efforts that can pave the way for the launch of a national reconciliation process, led by the Afghans themselves, as soon as possible, and we are ready to assist with this. The principle of honest and equal partnership, taking the interests of all regional stakeholders into account, which serves as a basis for the Moscow format and the mechanism of the resumed SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, is optimal for launching the negotiation process. We support Uzbekistan's initiative to hold a ministerial conference on the Afghanistan settlement in Tashkent on 26 and 27 March. We view it as part of the development of the Moscow format and the activities of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. We note the results of the second meeting of the Kabul Process on 28 February and the call to the Taliban by President Ghani of Afghanistan to begin a dialogue. We hope that the political appeals will be followed by practical steps to achieve that.

Afghanistan is on the threshold of a new election cycle. We support ensuring that parliamentary and presidential elections, which should be a powerful unifying factor for the Afghan people, are held on time. In order to do that, all of Afghanistan's political forces should hew to a balanced line that avoids polarizing society and infringing on national minority rights. Resolving the Afghan conflict, as with crisis situations in other parts of the world, requires that the key players ensure that their efforts genuinely intersect, and we are ready for that collaboration.

Ms. Cardona Moscoso (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to welcome Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, to the Security Council, in her role presiding over today's important debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I would also like to thank her delegation for its work in ensuring the adoption today of resolution 2405 (2018). We also thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of the High Peace Council and Ms. Mariam Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for their briefings.

It is an honour for me to be able to represent Bolivian women today. The women in my country are a symbol of determination and strength, which are qualities that have long gone unnoticed. Let us remember that today is not a day of festivities, but one that commemorates the struggle for women's' rights. Bolivia pays tribute to those women for all their fortitude, in particular for moving forward in conflict situations as in the case of the women of Afghanistan. We should recognize all their work not only today — on International Women's Day. That recognition should always be conveyed, but not just in speeches, but also in the form of concrete actions that empower women. That is the best way to honour them.

The role of women is a priority component in the development and unity of Afghan society. The involvement of women in the current process is particularly relevant owing to the fact that they are often the ones primarily responsible for their families while seeking to ensure their well-being. Now, however, they are taking on leadership roles in seeking peace in Afghanistan. Our inclusion in all areas is not only required to bring about sustainable development, but also to bring about the peace and security for which we strive so mightily in the Security Council, the Organization and throughout the world. As the Deputy Chairperson of Afghanistan's High Peace Council put it, "peace without women's meaningful participation is impossible".

Bolivia wishes once again to underscore the mission undertaken by the Security Council to Kabul in January, during which we were able to witness the people work to rebuild their country. That visit reaffirmed our commitment to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, as well as to carrying out joint activities aimed at the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy so as to prevent violent extremism. Nevertheless, we must express our deep concern about the increase in violent incidents that began this year owing to the various attacks against civilians, nearly one third of whom were children. It is essential that the negotiations move forward to avoid any further undermining of a peaceful settlement in the region.

As clearly stated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/165), the political volatility has been exacerbated and created a sense of insecurity in the community, particularly among the residents of Kabul, who were targeted by a wave of suicide attacks in January. The potential threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan will continue so long as the threat of terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorsan Province — which was responsible for several other attacks not only in Kabul, but also in the eastern province of Nangarhar — maintain their presence in Khorsan province and continue to resist the efforts by Afghan and international armed forces. Bolivia expresses its condemnation in the strongest terms of all terrorist acts, regardless of the group or entity that seeks to impose its ideology.

We also express our concern about the prolonged stalemate in the political dialogue between the National Unity Government of Afghanistan and the Jamiat-e-Islami political party. We believe that the time is ripe for the parties concerned to take proactive steps and move forward in view of the holding of the 2018 elections. We encourage the efforts by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan together with its Central Asian neighbours to promote mechanisms and platforms for regional, interregional and international cooperation to achieve peace, stability and long-term sustainable development, as well as actions to promote connectivity linking trade policies, finance, infrastructure improvement and trade among Afghanistan, Central Asian countries and other regions. We hope that the instability that Afghanistan is experiencing will shed its fragility so as to provide the stable environment needed for the holding of transparent and inclusive elections in the near future.

The fact that over the past several months many families have been displaced without any immediate prospect of returning to their homes in a safe and dignified manner remains an issue that the Security Council must continue to prioritize. In that regard, we call on the countries of the region to step up their commitment to share information and documentation that will ensure those people's voluntary, informed, dignified, safe and permanent return to their places of origin, and, at all costs, safeguard against a repetition of circumstances leading to their return to insecurity or areas that are inappropriate for them. Accordingly, Bolivia believes that the success of subregional, regional, interregional, and international projects, platforms and programmes must be framed by unequivocal respect for increasing the representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict pursuant to resolution 1325 (2000).

Lastly, we urge against any military solution to the situation in Afghanistan, and we join any initiative that promotes inclusive dialogue that is predicated on respect for sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of other countries. We therefore state our full support for the Kabul Process, which, under the leadership of the Government of Afghanistan, seeks to achieve peace, security and sustainability in the country for the benefit all Afghans.

Mr. Vassilenko (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I thank the Dutch delegation for convening us to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. I also express my gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi for their respective detailed briefings.

I underscore the symbolism that this debate is taking place on 8 March — International Women's Day. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all women and wish them happiness, love and prosperity.

Women play a primary role not only in prevention, but also in conflict resolution, peacekeeping and development. We recognize the importance of the role played by civil society, thanks to which women are participating at an increasing level in social spheres of every day life. We take note of the importance of a comprehensive analysis of today's topic as seen from a female perspective, as has been proposed by the presidency of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Kazakhstan commends the actions taken by the Government of Afghanistan, namely, seeking gender equality within public services; the adoption of a national plan of action, which will include developing a policy for the protection of women during crises; and the establishment of special courts to combat violence directed against women, as well as the adoption of a law on eliminating violence against women and espousing resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. We thank Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan for his statement.

As everyone knows, this coming fall Kazakhstan will hold a conference on the expansion of women's

rights in Afghanistan, which will cover the relevant socioeconomic and political areas in the country; sharing lessons learned in the area of establishing gender equality; and implementing recommendations concerning the expansion of women's rights in the country. I would like to inform the Council that Kazakhstan has taken the initiative of continuing co-financing the education programme for Afghan citizens, together with the European Union and other partners. Within the framework of that education programme, which has raised $50 million, nearly 1,000 Afghan citizens will have pursued their education in Kazakh universities during the period from 2010 to 2021. Currently the European Union is preparing financing for the first part of a related project, which will be implemented together with UN-Women. Its goal will be to provide education for female Afghan students in Kazakhstan.

We are very concerned by violence against women in Afghanistan as well as by the growing number of deaths due to terrorist attacks and massive air strikes conducted by the army. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/165), women accounted for some 12 per cent of the overall number of victims.

We support effective formats of regional and global cooperation as well as United Nations efforts in Afghanistan. We welcome the solutions that have been developed by UNAMA that are aimed at reducing the number of victims among civilians, improving their standard of living and developing the educational and medical fields. We call on all countries concerned to take part in implementing the relevant recommendations.

I should like to specify that thanks to the initiative of Kazakhstan during its presidency of the Council, a visit to Afghanistan was organized for members of the Council during which meetings were held with representatives of the Afghan Parliament and women's organizations, chaired by the First Lady, Rula Ghani. We should not forget that the number of terrorist attacks continues to grow, as shown by the attacks that took place in January and Kabul and Jalalabad, carried out by the Taliban and Da'esh.

We welcome the second Kabul Process, in which the Kazakh delegation participated. We believe that we should very carefully study the idea of beginning peace negotiations with the Taliban, as proposed by His Excellency President Ghani. It is vital to consider the following aspects in these negotiations: acknowledge the Taliban as a political party, impose a ceasefire, implement transitional confidence-building measures that will pave the way towards elections; revise the Constitution or introduce amendments thereinto; address grievances and apply the law; and release certain Taliban members from prison and remove some from United Nations sanctions lists. Political and economic problems as well as the security threats that Afghan is confronting requires the constant support of countries of the region, the international community, the United Nations and especially of the Security Council.

Kazakhstan continues to promote a model of sustainable development made up of three pillars.

First, concerning the link between security and development, we are convinced that to achieve lasting peace and security in the country, it is essential to implement development programmes.

The second pillar is a regional approach. In the context of the growing globalization of conflicts, this new approach will make it possible to confront cross-border challenges and threats, because it is impossible today to find solutions to these problems solely within the borders of one State. Proof of that was the launch on 23 February in Herat of two major transnational projects, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline and the tripartite Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan 500-kV power project, as well as the laying of fibre-optic cables and the building of a rail link between Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat.

The third major pillar is the principle of One United Nations. The growing number of conflicts and contemporary challenges requires greater coordination and efficiency in the work of the United Nations, both at Headquarters and at the regional level, especially in view of the cuts to the budget of the Organization. Without such coordination we would see a fragmentation of programmes and projects, which could be avoided by combining the efforts of the various structures and bodies of the global Organization in order to achieve sustainable development in a holistic manner rather than in a piecemeal way, focused on a specific region.

I should like to conclude my statement with a Kazakh proverb: "A woman rocks the cradle with one hand while running the world with the other".

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we welcome your presiding over this important meeting, Madam President. We thank the Special

Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto; Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of the Afghan High Peace Council; and Ms. Mariam Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for their valuable briefings.

The State of Kuwait appreciates the work of UNAMA. We value the vital role of Mr. Yamamoto, as well as the sincere efforts and dedication of United Nations staff in Afghanistan as they support the people of Afghanistan in these difficult circumstances. We welcome the adoption today of resolution 2405 (2018), extending the mandate of UNAMA.

Over the past four centuries, Afghanistan has suffered from political and security instability that has negatively affected the lives of the people. The critical political conditions in Afghanistan require all those who are wise and all the heads of political parties to give priority to national interests over partisan ones in order to provide the Afghan people with a decent life after years of war and conflict. We in the Council must continue to step upp our efforts to support the political process and to encourage the timely holding of the parliamentary and presidential elections. I would like to address the following points.

First, concerning the political situation, we welcome the efforts of the Independent Election Commission and the progress made towards the holding of the parliamentary elections next July, despite the recent domestic unrest in Afghanistan. The Commission has continued with its work and appointed a new management structure. It has prepared the voter registry and linked it to the polling stations. It has also approved national identification cards — *tazkiras* — as part of the voter-registration process. We hope that these preparations will lead to broad participation on the part of the Afghan people. There is also a need to focus on encouraging women to actively participate in the upcoming elections.

As the parliamentary elections draw near, we note with regret the increasing political tensions among the various political parties and coalitions in Afghanistan. This puts more pressure on the National Unity Government and has led to delays in the implementation of the national reform agenda.

Secondly, concerning the security situation, the State of Kuwait supports the call of the Secretary-General to lower the level of threat in Afghanistan and Central Asia. However, the security situation in Afghanistan is unstable. Conflict continues between the Government of Afghanistan and opposition forces in most of the country. The United Nations recorded 23,744 security incidents in Afghanistan in 2017, 65 per cent of which were due to armed conflict in Afghanistan. Suicide attacks have increased by 50 per cent compared to 2016. Those figures underscore the fact that the Afghani Government and the international community are facing a very daunting task. The Taliban and Da'esh continue to launch terrorist attacks against unarmed civilians. We are all aware that those attacks have caused many civilian casualties. Last year alone, UNAMA recorded 10,453 civilians killed or injured in violent acts, in addition to damaging homes and property and the displacement of families.

Third is the issue of human rights. When we speak about human rights we should recall the fact that today's meeting coincides with the International Women's Day. Women, and mothers in particular, make up half of the society and contribute significantly to raising new generations that can shoulder their responsibilities. We believe in the great role of women in our societies. They must be guaranteed all their political and civil rights. That is a basic demand all over the world, including in Afghanistan. The Government of Afghanistan has taken steps to improve gender equality in the civil service. We also welcome the enactment of by the Afghan Parliament of the new Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which is awaiting the President's approval to enter into force. We appreciate and commend the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to implement the new Law and resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. We hope that the Afghan Government will pursue such efforts in order to uphold the best interests of Afghan society.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait believes that lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region can be achieved only through a negotiated diplomatic settlement. History teaches us that military solutions do not lead to lasting peaceful settlements. We therefore urge all parties to participate constructively in the efforts to achieve peace through diplomacy in the interests and well-being of the Afghan people. Such diplomatic efforts should be coupled with significant and genuine investment in education, with which any true societal reform begins. Many nations torn apart by war, conflict and destruction have been able to recover

and join the ranks of developed countries because they invested in the education of future generations and allocated resources to education without discrimination between men and women. I think the best way to conclude my remarks would be to quote Nelson Mandela, the late former President of South Africa, who said, "Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world".

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by warmly thanking all the speakers, and in particular Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi, for their informative briefings. I also thank the Netherlands for taking the initiative to hold this important debate on 8 March, on the occasion of International Women's Day, which is also being celebrated in French, as we heard from Ambassador Vassilenko. The country of Simone de Beauvoir, Marie Curie and Simone Veil — my country — takes this day very seriously. President Macron has made promoting equality between men and women the major cause of his five-year term. I will make four comments today on the situation in Afghanistan.

My first comment concerns the fragile security situation, which Ms. Safi described to us and which is illustrated in particular by the recent terrorist attacks on Kabul and Jalalabad and their impact on the Afghan population. France firmly condemns those terrorist attacks, which once again targeted Afghan civilians, especially women and children. We reiterate our sympathy and support for the victims of that cowardly and hateful violence and for their families.

As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/165) emphasizes, the level of violence in Afghanistan has grown in recent months as a result of the ongoing threat posed by the Taliban and the increased presence of Da'esh, which Mr. Yamamoto mentioned just now. France calls for all parties to protect civilians and welcomes the efforts of the Afghan authorities in that regard, as well as the determination of the Afghan security forces in their fight against terrorism. France also welcomes the commitments made in Kabul on 28 February by all of Afghanistan's neighbours, and other international partners, to increasing their cooperation with the Afghan authorities in order to combat the double threat of terrorism and transnational organized crime. The ongoing efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners to fight drug trafficking deserve special emphasis and should be further strengthened, including within the framework of the Paris Pact Initiative.

Women are dying of terrorist violence in Afghanistan, but they are also victims of other types of violence related to the Afghan conflict. In particular, we condemn the executions of women ordered by the Taliban courts and the numerous cases of sexual violence, of which there have been more than 170 verified cases in 2017. We welcome the Afghan Government's launch of an action plan to eliminate early marriages for the period from 2017 to 2021, which we hope will help to end that deplorably widespread practice.

Secondly, I would like to refer to the ongoing efforts to arrive at a lasting political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. Since our last debate, in December 2017 (see S/PV.8147), progress has been made with an Afghan-led peace process. The proposal for peace talks without preconditions, made by President Ashraf Ghani to the Taliban at the second Kabul Process conference on 28 February, is a positive development. Along with the countries and international organizations that are participants in the Kabul process, France supports this peace proposal, which offers the Taliban recognition as a political force. However, we also want to emphasize our demand that the Taliban renounce all violence. France welcomes the efforts of the Afghan authorities to establish a broad national consensus in support of the peace proposal and encourages them to continue along this path, particularly by working to ensure the cohesiveness of the National Unity Government and avoiding the temptation to retreat into communities or ethnic groups, as well as by ensuring women's active participation at all levels of decision-making.

With regard to that last point, we should note the significant progress that has been achieved, especially in the increase in the number of women in the High Peace Council, as Ms. Sarabi mentioned today. The gradual implementation of the national action plan on the women and peace and security agenda is essential in that respect. The time has come to make a qualitative leap and ensure that Afghan women can fully participate in all decision-making processes. That should begin, for example, with greater participation in the joint secretariat of the High Council, in which there are currently only three women. There can be no lasting peace without the active and effective participation of Afghan women in the process, and that must be an integral part of the national consensus forged during the second Kabul conference. Finally, France urges all partners in Afghanistan, especially its neighbours, to support and facilitate this inclusive peace process. The

Security Council should also make itself available in support of that process.

My third comment concerns the elections, which are the other high priority for Afghanistan in 2018 and 2019. While progress has been made with electoral reform and the preparations led by the Independent Electoral Commission, there is still a long way to go. France encourages the Afghan Government to continue its efforts to fulfil its responsibilities, with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and its international partners, in order to guarantee the holding of free, transparent and inclusive local and parliamentary elections before the end of the year. In that regard, as resolution 2405 (2018), which we have just adopted, emphasizes, it is essential to ensure that women are able to fully participate in the electoral processes as voters and candidates. That means renewed efforts to make sure that people understand the importance of everyone's vote, including through awareness-raising campaigns. That participation also means that women who have decided to run as candidates must be protected and assisted, and that those who have not yet dared to run should be encouraged to do so. On this 8 March, we also hope that the willingness of the Afghan authorities to give women their rightful place will result in equal access to education.

My fourth and last remark concerns the importance of international support, and in particular UNAMA, for Afghanistan. Following the Council's visit to Kabul in January, the unanimous adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), renewing the Mission's mandate, is another demonstration of the international community's unwavering support for Afghanistan. By endorsing the recommendations of the strategic review conducted in the summer of 2017, the resolution enables UNAMA to refocus on its core missions in support of peace efforts and the preparation of the elections.

I pay tribute to the remarkable work done by your delegation, Madam President, in the conduct of the negotiations and I congratulate you on this excellent result.

Finally, I welcome the Secretary-General's decision to host the next ministerial conference in Geneva in November, two years after the Brussels Donors Conference. It will demonstrate once again our collective and lasting commitment to peace, security and development in Afghanistan.

Allow me in conclusion to reiterate France's full support for the Afghan Government in the search for lasting peace for all Afghan women and men, and for United Nations personnel working in particularly difficult conditions.

The President: I remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia.

Ms. Bishop (Australia): After decades of conflict, the Afghan National Security Forces continue to make daily sacrifices in their efforts to protect their communities, while the Afghan people continue to suffer the ravages of terrorism and conflict. It remains vital that the international community continue to stand with the Afghan people in their efforts to defeat terrorism and pursue peaceful development.

The struggle against extremist ideology of groups like the Taliban is existential for many communities. There is no place in our world for a doctrine that defines women and girls as second-class citizens, and where young girls have their hopes and dreams crushed by an ideology that deprives them of education, respect and free will. There are many reasons for our support for the Afghan Government; however, few are as important as the future welfare of the women and girls of that beautiful country.

On this International Women's Day, we commit anew to the courageous women and girls of Afghanistan. Australia will maintain our 300-strong commitment to the NATO-led Resolute Support mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan Security Forces, and our annual $100-million commitment to its support. The Australian Government reiterates our condemnation of the actions of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and ISIS-inspired groups, Al-Qaida, its affiliates and other terrorist groups, including in Afghanistan. In February, Australia listed the Islamic State-Khorasan Province for counter-terrorism-targeted financial sanctions.

Since 2001, Australia has also been committed to Afghanistan's development, including by providing $1.34 billion in development assistance. Sustainable economic growth is the key to lifting more Afghan people out of poverty. We are seeing advances, with women and girls now having opportunities for education and economic participation while their rights are being

codified in Afghanistan's laws. Women, at least as much as men, must win the peace in Afghanistan, and we support their participation in the upcoming elections, both as candidates and as citizens exercising their democratic rights. More work is needed to ensure that Afghans can fulfil their potential, including those displaced due to the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

Australia continues to support Afghanistan's efforts to reintegrate displaced people and returnees and to meet the humanitarian and development needs of its citizens. Today I announce a $60-million humanitarian support package to assist Afghanistan's refugees, displaced people and their host communities in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Australia will continue to support Afghanistan's efforts in responding to the ongoing challenges of food security, safety and health needs, particularly of vulnerable women and children.

Afghanistan needs enduring peace to fulfil its undoubted potential that can only come through negotiation and dialogue. The November 2018 ministerial conference in Geneva will provide the opportunity for Afghanistan to demonstrate progress towards a political settlement, give priority its development needs and build international confidence. The Australian Government acknowledges the commitment of the Afghan Government and people, and the bravery of the Afghan security forces in their determination to end conflict. We also appreciate the valuable contribution of all United Nations agencies, diplomatic partners and their staff in Afghanistan.

Like all people, Afghans want to live their lives in peace and security and strive for higher standards of living. We are reliable and enduring partners in the struggle to reach that goal. The men and women, girls and boys, and families of Afghanistan are counting on us all.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mrs. Purschel (Germany): Let me thank Mr. Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General; Ms. Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of the High Peace Council; and Ms. Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for their comprehensive briefings.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

To start, I would like to commend the National Unity Government for holding the second Kabul Process conference on 28 February, despite the series of atrocious attacks only weeks earlier. This is a testament to the courage of the Afghan people. There is no purely military solution to this conflict. After so many years, the Taliban have achieved none of their objectives and they never will. All they can do is prolong the misery of their own people.

The only sustainable solution is a negotiated peace without losers. President Ghani's offer to enter into talks with the Taliban without preconditions is an important step towards such an intra-Afghan peace process. The participants in the Kabul conference lent their full support to this offer; now it is up to the Taliban to respond.

Furthermore, we are encouraged by the steps taken to prepare for the parliamentary and district council elections. The presentation of the voter registration concept and the appointment of a new member to the Afghan Independent Election Commission gave new impetus to the process. The postponement of the election from July to a later date in 2018 seems realistic. However, the electoral preparations must be accelerated to hold the elections within this year.

As the Secretary-General notes in his report (S/2018/165), the number of security related incidents in 2017 was the highest ever recorded. We deeply deplore the high number of civilian lives lost — especially the lives of so many children — and we condemn the particularly brutal series of attacks by anti-Government elements at the beginning of this year. The Afghan Security Forces continue to stand on the front line in this fight against terrorism. We applaud the envisaged security sector reforms that aim to improve the professionalism of the Afghan National Army, especially by retiring several hundred generals and bringing on a new generation of military leaders.

To train, advise and assist the Afghan National Security Forces, Germany intends to increase the number of its troops committed to the Resolute Support Mission by approximately 300, to a total of up to 1,300 soldiers. We will then be the second-largest troop contributor to the Mission after the United States.

We also welcome the fact that further efforts have been made to strengthen the legal and the anti-corruption framework. The recently adopted amendments to the penal code may help to reduce war crimes, and the

adoption of the Law on Declaration and Registration of Assets of State Officials and Employees will yield visible progress in fighting corruption and foster the rule of law if implemented correctly.

We thank the Kingdom of the Netherlands for putting a women, peace and security focus on today's debate. This emphasis is much welcome and important, and not just because it is International Women's Day.

I would like to commend the intention of the Afghan Government to increase the representation of women in the civil service to 24 per cent by the end of this year, in line with Afghanistan's national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000). At the same time, I would like to put particular emphasis on the importance of enforcing the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Too many reported cases remain unheard by the competent courts. In that context, let me also thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its excellent work in tracking the human rights situation across the country, most recently through its annual report on the protection of civilians.

Germany continues to support UNAMA and United Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. We welcome the renewal of the UNAMA mandate today. It is particularly important that the Security Council endorse the outcome of the strategic review to give the Mission a reliable basis for planning the necessary adjustments. As on previous occasions, I would like to stress that the important tasks of the now abolished Rule of Law Unit should be fully integrated into UNAMA's core activities.

Let me conclude by inviting all participants in this meeting to a movie screening in German House today. As a concrete measure to highlight the role of women on this important day, we are proud to present the first international screening of the documentary *We the Women of Afghanistan: a silent revolution*. We are pleased that Afghanistan, Canada and the Netherlands will be there to support the event as hosts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and the other briefers for their briefings, and Ambassador Saikal for his statement. We also thank the Secretary General for his report. (S/2018/165)

As we mark International Women's Day today, it is time to recognize and reflect on the enormous achievements of Afghan women and girls. It is truly heartening to see empowered women and girls in Afghanistan who participate in different spheres of life. They strive for and contribute to the prosperous and peaceful future of their country. They merit the admiration and full support of the international community.

We cannot emphasize strongly enough the need to consolidate the achievements of the past 17 years in Afghanistan. This requires the sustained support of the international community to the Afghan Government and people. In that understanding, we applaud the greater attention paid by the Security Council to the situation in Afghanistan. We also commend the role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in standing with the Afghan people and coordinating the efforts of the international stakeholders in Afghanistan. We will continue to support UNAMA's activities and efforts. In this context, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), renewing the mandate of UNAMA.

Afghanistan is at yet another critical juncture. Addressing the challenge of establishing sustained peace, stability and security in the country remains central. In that understanding, Turkey was represented at the second Kabul Process conference, held on 28 February. At the meeting, we reiterated that lasting peace in Afghanistan could be achieved through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. We also made a call on all the groups in Afghanistan to denounce violence, recognize the Government of Afghanistan and become part of the legitimate political life of the country. We hope that the call made at the meeting by President Ghani for peace negotiations without preconditions will receive a positive response from the Taliban. Meanwhile, we also believe that, the National Unity Government needs to be more inclusive in order to overcome ethnic tensions and garner the support of all segments of Afghan society in this critical period.

Strengthened collaboration among the countries of the region is crucial to the success of Afghanistan. Our vision for Afghanistan is a peaceful and stable country that enjoys good and cooperative relations with its neighbours, while being at the centre of major regional projects. We are confident that this cooperation could be achieved through dialogue and stronger engagement. Accordingly, Turkey will continue to contribute to

regional cooperation efforts, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

In concluding, I would like to reiterate Turkey's commitment to standing by our Afghan sisters and brothers in their quest for a better future as long as our help is needed.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): At the outset, allow me to congratulate the Kingdom of the Netherlands on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We are very proud of the close collaboration between our two countries in the framework of our split term. Allow me to say that it is a personal pleasure to see you in that position, Madam.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union. I wish to add some points in my national capacity.

We also welcome today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The Mission plays a vital role in the partnership between Afghanistan and the international community in the face of extremely complex challenges and difficult conditions on the ground. From its efforts to facilitate the peace process to the delicate issues revolving around electoral processes and reforms, we strongly appreciate and support UNAMA's contribution.

We condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks that have taken place in Afghanistan and its capital in the past weeks. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the Afghan Government and to the families of the victims. The intensity of the conflict remains worryingly high, with tragic effects on the population, as UNAMA's regular reporting on civilian casualties continues to assess. In this difficult context, we welcome President Ghani's courageous peace offer, as presented at the second conference of the Kabul Process, which took place last week. This offer represents a tangible demonstration that the Afghan authorities are determined to pursue the objective of peace through dialogue with insurgent groups.

The National Unity Government's proposal opens a political window of opportunity for the peace and reconciliation process, which must be explored and pursued to its fullest potential. We therefore hope that the Taliban will grasp the significance of this opening by accepting the Government's invitation to come to the table in the spirit of sincere dialogue, with the shared objective of putting an end to the conflict and thereby opening the way to a future of peace and prosperity for Afghanistan and its people.

We are aware that bringing about the conditions for a meaningful peace process is not an easy task. Every effort must be made in order to give substance to the road map. To further this objective, it will be crucial to generate a broad national consensus in support of the peace process. We therefore appreciate and encourage the commitment of the Government and its relevant institutions to maintaining and strengthening its efforts to reach out to all components of Afghan society on the basis of a truly inclusive approach.

In this context, it is essential that Afghan women be given the opportunity to play a primary and active role, first and foremost in order to ensure that the rights enshrined in the Constitution and the broader civil and social gains made in the past 16 years are protected and promoted. We strongly appreciate the Government's commitment in this regard, which should be reflected in its road map for peace.

The support of the Afghan people for the peace process will also be strengthened by the necessary cohesion between various political groups, as well as the ability of the Government to meet the needs of the population by enacting the necessary reforms. Ensuring that the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections are held in a timely, transparent and inclusive manner will certainly provide an important contribution to this goal.

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a formidable obstacle on the road to peace. A decisive, common effort against this grave threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan remains a key factor. Italy continues to play its part in this regard in the framework of the Resolute Support Mission by providing a significant contribution to strengthen the capacities of the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces.

To be fully successful in defeating terrorist groups, however, it is also necessary to bring about a close and genuine collaboration between regional stakeholders. This also applies to the fight against transnational criminal networks and drug trafficking. We therefore encourage all efforts geared towards making concrete progress in terms of a constructive dialogue and effective cooperation between neighbouring countries

on the basis of a common understanding that this kind of win-win cooperation can bring tangible benefits to all parties.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): This debate is taking place at an important inflection point in the 17-year history of the current conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan strongly condemns the recent spate of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. There is no justification for attacks that kill or maim innocent children, women and men.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/165) paints a grim and bleak picture of the situation in Afghanistan — a continued political impasse that threatens the country's unity, an economy in stress and decline, corruption, drug production and trafficking and a security environment that in 2017 witnessed a 67 per cent spike in airstrikes, an increase in terrorist attacks and the highest number of civilian casualties ever recorded in Afghanistan. Moreover, the continuing presence of large numbers of terrorist groups and foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan pose a threat to the long-term stability of Afghanistan, its neighbours, including my country, and the entire region.

Against that troubled backdrop, President Ashraf Ghani's recent proposal for a dignified process of talks without preconditions with the Taliban offers an opportunity to construct and initiate a credible peace process. For over a decade now, Pakistan has advocated the restoration of peace in Afghanistan through a negotiated settlement between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban. The international community has also endorsed the goal of a negotiated settlement promoted through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process as the best, and indeed only, way to realize lasting peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Pakistan will play its part in encouraging the initiation of such a dignified negotiation process. We reiterate and renew our call on the Taliban to renounce violence and agree to join the peace talks. However, the task ahead is complex, arduous and delicate. Above all, seizing the opportunity requires an understanding that the simultaneous resort to more kinetic actions, the escalation of military force to shift the battlefield, will evoke an escalation of attacks by the insurgents and erode, rather than advance, the prospect of initiating the envisaged peace process. After 17 years, both the Afghan Government and its coalition allies, as well as the Taliban, should have learned that neither can impose a military victory on the other. The renewed escalation of force will impose further suffering on the people of Afghanistan.

Secondly, while the talks would be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, other parties involved, including the United States, would need to engage in and contribute to the negotiation process.

Thirdly, some regional Powers and Afghan parties have remained consistently hostile to reconciliation between the Afghan Government and the Afghan Taliban. The international community must oppose their anticipated effort to derail the peace process outlined by President Ashraf Ghani.

Fourthly, there is growing and widespread concern regarding the rapid increase in the presence of Da'esh in Afghanistan. A recent report notes that the Afghan Government controls only 18 per cent of the country's districts and has influence in an additional 38 per cent. The rest, sadly, is ungoverned. It is in the ungoverned and uncontested spaces in Afghanistan's north and east that Da'esh and its affiliates are installing themselves and threatening Afghanistan and its neighbours. The elimination of Da'esh and its affiliates must be accorded high priority in the endeavour to achieve lasting peace in the region.

Fifthly, the power of assorted terrorist groups and criminal gangs in Afghanistan cannot be broken when they continue to receive a steady stream of revenue from drug production and drug trafficking. The Afghan Government and its international partners must brake the nexus between drug production and terrorism.

Pakistan, my country, has the highest stake in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. My country has suffered gravely due to the decades of war, violence and terrorism emanating from our neighbouring country. Over the past four years, Pakistan has successfully turned the tide against terrorism by conducting the largest and most sustained anti-terrorism campaign anywhere in the world, with the deployment of over 200,000 of our troops. That campaign will continue until all terrorists, without distinction, are eliminated.

Today the threat of terrorism in Pakistan emanates principally from outside of our borders. As Pakistan's army chief, General Qamar Bajwa, noted in remarks to the recent Munich Security Conference, of the 131 terrorist attacks on our territory, 123 were conceived,

planned and executed from Afghanistan. That is happening despite the presence of the most powerful military alliance in Afghanistan. We want to see the elimination of the sanctuaries where those terrorists operate against my country.

Pakistan also requires effective cooperation from Kabul and the coalition forces to control and manage the long border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. My country has nearly 1,000 border posts, but on the other side there are only 220. In one stretch of 648 kilometres, there is not a single Afghan post. Yet the responsibility for containing regional terrorism and cross-border movement is placed on my country. Pakistan plans to fence and electronically monitor the entire border with Afghanistan. That project should be actively supported by the international community and Afghanistan.

My country has offered unprecedented hospitality and support to the Afghan people, our brothers and sisters, over the past several decades of their travail and tragedy provoked by internal strife and foreign military interventions. We continue to host the largest protracted presence of refugees anywhere in the world and have delayed sending them back again on compassionate grounds.

Finally, as Pakistan, the Afghan Government and the coalition work together to evolve an agreed course of action for peace and stability in Afghanistan, it is essential that all parties refrain from campaigns of vilification and coercion. Pakistan's cooperation cannot be garnered by pressure or intimidation.

To conclude, allow me to convey a message from my Government and my people to our sisters in Afghanistan. We stand with them in support of their rights and liberty. We regard an assault on their rights as a threat to our rights, and indeed to the rights of women everywhere. We are together in the pursuit of our shared goal to ensure a life of dignity and liberty for every girl and every woman, wherever they may be.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Bonser (Canada) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan on the special occasion of International Women's Day. Canada thanks the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for keeping Member States apprised of progress made in the country. In particular, we thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing on, and tireless work in favour of, Afghanistan.

(*spoke in English*)

Allow me to join others in conveying our sincere condolences to the people of Afghanistan in the wake of recent violent attacks in Kabul and across the country. We are disheartened by the toll such attacks take on civilians, in particular on women and children. While UNAMA's recent report of a 9 per cent decrease in civilian casualties in 2017 — as compared to 2016 — is an improvement, any civilian casualties are unacceptable.

There are three themes that I will address today: the peace and reconciliation process, the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of Afghan society and progress on human rights.

First, in the wake of the spike in recent violence, it is now more essential than ever that the Afghan Government, the armed insurgency and all parties in the conflict come to the table for sincere peace negotiations. In that regard, we urge the Taliban and other insurgent groups to cease to use violence and to engage in a negotiated peace. Peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan must be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led. In support of that, Canada commends both the Afghan Government for convening the Kabul Process on 28 February and Afghanistan's neighbours for their efforts to work with the Government of Afghanistan towards a more peaceful and stable region.

That brings me to my second point, namely, the inclusion of women in all aspects of society, including peace processes. For a peaceful, stable and prosperous future to be achieved, women must be included, on equal footing as men, in decision-making at all levels of politics, society and the economy. Canada's national action plan on women and peace and security recognizes that peace is more enduring, stable and inclusive when women are actively engaged in such processes. For that reason, women must be given a prominent role in peace negotiations at all levels and in all venues. As women currently hold less than a third of parliamentary seats in Afghanistan, it is especially important that we ensure women are meaningfully included as both candidates and informed voters in the upcoming elections.

The last theme I will address today is human rights. Promoting and protecting human rights, with a

focus on women and girls, is at the core of Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. Although there has been notable progress made in that area, women continue to be at a disadvantage as compared to men. Ongoing violence, moreover, continues to deliberately and disproportionately target marginalized ethnic and religious groups, journalists, human rights activists and civil society organizations. That is deplorable, and has not gone un-noticed.

Canada remains committed to advancing the rights of all Afghans by helping to improve governance systems, increasing the capacity of Afghan institutions and meeting the basic needs of the Afghan people, especially women and girls. That includes supporting the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces; improving access to safe, quality education and health services; and fostering greater economic opportunities. Canada, moreover, remains a significant contributor to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, a leading defender of human rights in the country.

We were pleased to see that the Council has renewed the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for a further 12 months. The Council can count on Canada as a committed partner to help Afghans create a more equitable, just and sustainable future for all. We will continue to stand-by Afghanistan in its efforts towards peace and regional stability.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): Since the start of this year there has been sharper focus by the Security Council on issues relating to Afghanistan. The Council members' visit to Afghanistan, the ministerial debate on Afghanistan and regional connectivity (see S/PV.8162) and the enhanced focus by the Chairman of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) on the situation in the country all bode well for the attention that the worsening situation in Afghanistan necessitates.

I thank you, Madam President, for following that welcome trend and organizing today's debate. We also thank Ambassador Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for sharing his insights on the prospects for peace ahead of us in 2018. We also appreciate the eloquent portrayals of the strides made by Afghan women and what more needs to be done in that regard.

The report (S/2018/165) of the Secretary General has highlighted what we feared. The year 2017 was perhaps the worst year in terms of civilian causalities and security incidents in Afghanistan. Thousands of innocent and precious Afghan lives fell prey to mindless violence. It is in that context that we welcome the adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), which extends the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as an affirmation of the collective objective of support for the Afghan people. The brave Afghan people must not lose hope, and we, the international community, must not lose heart.

We specifically welcome the Council's focus on linkages among extremism, terrorism, drug production and the illegal exploitation of the natural resources of Afghanistan. The increase in the cultivation of poppy in the areas under the control of the Taliban and the Taliban's involvement in virtually all aspects of the opium trade suggest that it is akin to a drug cartel. We hope that the Council will better utilize the range of tools available to it to deal with those transnational networks of drugs, terrorism and crime.

Despite the international community's efforts, those supporting the terrorists affecting Afghanistan have not been deterred. There are still those who provide sanctuaries to support the dark agendas of terrorist organizations like the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. Indeed, the challenges posed by cross-border terrorism emanating from safe havens and sanctuaries to Afghanistan and to our region must be addressed.

Today being International Women's Day, we join in acknowledging that women are perhaps the worst-affected by the protracted conflict and violence in Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the continuing conflict situation, Afghanistan has come a long way since the days of the Taliban, who had reduced women to less than second-class citizens under a despotic regime. Women in the country are no longer imprisoned in their homes and are making progress in all sectors, from technology to athletics and from transportation to the civil service. As we heard earlier, they are committed to continuing their struggles in order to play a significant role in building a progressive and stable society. Afghan women have achieved a lot in the two recent decades. We must not allow those gains to be lost or wasted.

India has invested over $2 billion in Afghanistan since 2002 in the reconstruction and development of the country. A major focus of our work has been on nearly 550 high-impact community development projects, which cut across areas such as education, health, agriculture and irrigation, power and energy. All of them have a direct bearing on improving the lives of all Afghans, including girls and women, specially so for projects in the education and health-care sectors.

Indian women's non-governmental orgainzations have undertaken various activities in Afghanistan such, as vocational training of Afghan women in India, as well as establishing women's vocational training centres in various provinces of Afghanistan. They have been working for almost a decade with poor women workers and sending them for training-of-trainers sessions in India. To date, 150 women trainers have been trained in India out of the target of 200 up until May 2018. In addition, more than 3,000 Afghan women have been trained in Kabul and other provinces in Afghanistan to help them to establish a women's self-help organizations in Kabul. During the past three years, about 5,000 Afghan female students have been trained under various higher education scholarship schemes. Moreover, several rural women from Afghanistan have been trained at the Barefoot College in Rajasthan, India, in the field of solar electrification. We will continue our work on the ground to help the women and girls of Afghanistan become self-reliant and capable of playing an effective part in the reconstruction of their country.

If we are to preserve the achievements of Afghan women and girls, the international community must continue to extend its full support to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. The Afghan National Unity Government recently once again issued a new call for peace and proposed a concrete approach to the Taliban to join the mainstream. The Afghan Government's willingness for peace is despite the fact that armed groups have identified themselves and demonstrated to all of us that they are the irreconcilables. Those efforts by the Afghan Government calling on the armed groups to cease violence and join the national peace and reconciliation process, which would protect the rights of all Afghans, including women, children and minorities, deserve our full support. However, it should also be clear to the armed opposition that there will be no tolerance for those who continue violence. Any violence needs a robust response. The irreconcilable guns need to be silenced.

The indomitable courage of the Afghan people, the spirit of the Afghan youth and the strength of their dreams are a source of collective pride for our region. India is committed to continuing its efforts to strengthen that spirit by supporting all initiatives designed to end violence and bring back peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Iran): I would like to express my appreciation to the Netherlands presidency for organizing today's debate. I also thank the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his statement. I would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing on the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2018/165).

Unfortunately, security remains the major challenge for Afghanistan. According to the Secretary-General's report, 2017 ended with the highest level of security-related incidents ever recorded. A wave of deadly, complex attacks, in particular three major attacks in Kabul with hundreds of fatalities, continued throughout January 2018. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province remained operationally resilient, thereby exacerbating the volatile security situation as conflict between the Government and terrorists, as well as extremist groups, continued throughout most of the country.

Iran continues to support the promotion of security and stability and comprehensive and sustainable development in Afghanistan. It supports any Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled call for a reconciliation and peace process. It is in that context that we agreed to participate in the Kabul Process — and endorsed its final declaration in February this year — and in similar processes to help achieve peace and security in Afghanistan.

The Afghan National Unity Government is in the forefront of fighting terrorism, in particular the Taliban, Al-Qaida, Da'esh and its affiliates, as well as other terrorists and extremist groups and criminals. The sustained support of the international community is needed to support the Afghan Government in that

fight and to address its complex security, economic and political challenges.

Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major step towards consolidating peace and improving its economic status in the region. In that regard, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Kazakhstan for its initiative to organize a ministerial debate on regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia, as a model to link security and development during its presidency of the Security Council in January. The world should regard the situation in Afghanistan not as an opportunity for competition but as one to establish peace, security and stability through development — a win-win approach for Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, including those in Central Asia and the international community in general.

For more than three decades, Iran has hosted millions of Afghan refugees and has shared much needed subsidized goods and services with them, including basic commodities, public health and public education. This year alone, our schools are providing education to nearly 400,000 undocumented Afghan students. With that in mind, we welcome and urge further efforts to strengthen the process of regional economic cooperation, including measures to facilitate regional connectivity, trade and transit. Over a decade and in total, Iran has funded more than 300 development projects, including reconstruction and building infrastructure totalling $500 million. Such projects have the capacity to change regional economic perspectives and can help prosperity and stability in Afghanistan.

During the reporting period, trade through Iran's Bandar Abbas and Chabahar ports increased as of early 2017, marking a significant shift in Afghanistan's access to markets and international trade. The findings of the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, indicating an 87 per cent growth in opium production, are alarming given the fact that narcotics provide a major source of income for terrorist groups. The international community must support the relevant international and regional projects and activities, including those carried out by Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, within the framework of the triangular initiative to counter narcotics.

We reiterate our support for UNAMA and United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through a comprehensive plan. Sustained ownership and partnership with the Afghan Government are needed in order to utilize the best potential of UNAMA and the United Nations system to deliver the necessary services in priority areas, as advised by the national Government.

The General Assembly, through its resolution 64/253, recognized 21 March of each year as the International Day of Nowruz. Nowruz — "New Day" — is celebrated in many countries, including Afghanistan. Nowruz has served as the common inspiration for peace and reconciliation for more than 300 million people around the globe. On the eve of Nowruz, I would like to express my best wishes to the fraternal people of Afghanistan, wishing them a happy Nowruz, and reassure them of Iran's full support in their endeavour to reach peace and prosperity in their country.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Ms. Adamson: On International Women's Day, and on any other day, I am delighted to see you in the President's chair, Madam.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its Member States.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/165) and strategic review. I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing.

I express deep sorrow following the terrorist attacks in January, in particular the three in Kabul that inflicted hundreds of casualties, as well as the attack against Save the Children in Jalalabad. I express sincere condolences to the Afghan people and the Government for the horrific attacks against Afghan civilians and security personnel. I reiterate the EU's unwavering engagement to stand by Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism, which is a global threat. The EU calls for an in-depth investigation of those crimes and identification of the perpetrators, who must be brought to justice.

The EU strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people. The EU wishes to have the closest and strongest relationship with UNAMA, both on the ground and in international forums, for the ultimate benefit of Afghanistan.

The EU fully supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process that will bring all Afghans together and pave the way to a better future for Afghanistan and the whole region. The EU welcomes the second meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation on 28 February as an important step towards peace and reconciliation. The European Union commends all those that made the conference possible: the Afghan Government and people, participants, regional actors and international partners. At the meeting, the Afghan Government put forward an important and welcome offer of peace to the Taliban. We encourage the Taliban to seize that offer and anticipate that it will lead towards the establishment of a genuine peace process.

On 8 February, the EU held its first meeting of the EU-Afghanistan Joint Committee under the Cooperation Agreement for Partnership and Development. The Cooperation Agreement came into force provisionally as of 1 December 2017 and establishes a formal bilateral relationship. Ahead of the Joint Committee, High Representative of the European Union Federica Mogherini and Afghan Minister of Finance Eklil Hakimi met and emphasized their strong commitment to bringing about peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Respect for human rights, the full and equal participation of women and democratic elections continue to be a focus of the EU's dialogue with the Afghan authorities and of the EU's actions in the country. In fact, human rights now form an integral part of the structured dialogue between the EU and Afghanistan under the framework that I just mentioned. In 2017, the human rights situation remained fragile and worrying in Afghanistan. There were positive achievements with the adoption of human rights legislation, such as the revised Penal Code and the Child Rights Protection Law.

Progress has also been noted on the implementation of the national action plan pursuant to resolution 1325 (2000) and on the elimination of violence against women, for which Afghanistan has prepared an implementation strategy. However, more needs to be done. The EU is particularly pleased that the Kabul Process conference underlined the need to safeguard the achievements made in the area of women's rights in recent years. Moreover, the elections scheduled for 2018 and 2019 must ensure the participation of women as candidates, voters or staff members, thereby safeguarding their rights as equal citizens.

The death penalty remains a topic of discussion, and the EU repeats its call for a moratorium. On the positive side, we note that, in the new Penal Code, the number of crimes to which capital punishment applies has been considerably reduced.

The EU calls for more concrete and accelerated actions to implement the anti-corruption strategy that was adopted, including an independent monitoring mechanism.

With regard to the elections, some progress has been made on the appointment of the leadership of the Independent Election Commission and on voter registration. Electoral preparations for the parliamentary and district elections must be accelerated. The EU and its member States remain committed to supporting the Afghan electoral process. The EU has committed €15.5 million to that end.

The EU and Afghanistan continue to engage in a comprehensive dialogue on migration. The implementation of the Joint Way Forward on migration issues between Afghanistan and the European Union is part of that discussion, with several planned common actions related to cooperation on addressing and preventing irregular migration and on the return of irregular migrants, the fight against smuggling and trafficking in human beings and awareness-raising activities on illegal migration.

The European Commission continues to support Afghanistan through programmes for Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries to the amount of approximately €200 million. Our aim is to support a safe, manageable, predictable, voluntary and dignified return process for Afghan migrants.

In 2017, UNAMA documented 10,453 civilian casualties, which is a decrease of 9 per cent as compared to 2016. However, the persistently high levels of violence and the corresponding impact on civilians remain a deep concern to the EU.

We need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and to respect their impartiality and humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent

needs of the most vulnerable. In view of the threat posed by the many mines and improvised explosive devices, the EU also encourages Afghanistan to maintain the current pace of demining. We support the efforts of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission to provide further training, advice and assistance for the Afghan security forces and institutions.

The EU is alarmed about the sharp increase in opium production in Afghanistan by 83 per cent in 2017 as compared to 2016, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The illegal narcotics production and trade remain major critical challenges to the long-term stability and sustainability of the State, while providing significant funds to anti-Government forces and criminal networks.

To conclude, the recent meeting of the Kabul Process on peace and security was a clear offer of peace to the Taliban, and we anticipate that that offer will now lead to the establishment of a genuine peace process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. The EU continues to consider UNAMA a key partner in that. UNAMA has an invaluable role in ensuring the broadest possible international support for that Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. The EU will continue to support those efforts with all the means at its disposal.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mrs. Van Vlierberge (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): First of all, as others have done before me, I would like to convey our deepest condolences to the Afghan people and their Government for the terrible attacks against Afghan civilians and security personnel. Belgium strongly supports the efforts of the international community to ensure security, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan. Belgium has made regular and significant contributions to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund and will continue to invest in the security of the Afghan people, in particular by increasing its presence in Afghanistan from 50 to nearly 100 soldiers next month.

Belgium would like to associate itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union, in particular by highlighting the indispensable role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people, promoting peace and reconciliation, monitoring and promoting human rights, and coordinating the assistance of the international community. We also commend the Government of Afghanistan for acceding to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and its five Protocols on 9 August 2017, thereby demonstrating its commitment to addressing the issues covered by the Convention and its Protocols.

I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto, Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi for their briefings and for their tireless efforts towards lasting peace in Afghanistan. Allow me to thank you, Madam President, for organizing this quarterly debate on Afghanistan on such an auspicious day, International Women's Day, and only a week after the very successful second conference of the Kabul Process. Now is the best time to discuss women and peace and security in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, women continue to suffer the consequences of the conflict. Last year, the number of female deaths increased by 5 per cent as compared to the previous year. That is particularly tragic, since women also hold the key to more peace and security. Studies show that a greater participation of women leads to more effective humanitarian assistance, more lasting peace agreements and post-conflict recovery. There is a direct correlation between women's level of education and sustainable development. Encouraging women's rights and inclusion is not a matter of political correctness or moral debate but a proven recipe for success. That is why the women and peace and security agenda deserves all the support that we can collectively provide.

We take this opportunity to commend the progress made by the Government of Afghanistan. The aforementioned increase in the number of female deaths is primarily attributable to terrorist suicide bombings. The casualties attributable to the Government forces decreased by 19 per cent. Afghanistan has made clear commitments and has developed an action plan on women and peace and security. More and more women hold important Government positions. We also welcome the recent decree endorsing the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and we look forward to its implementation.

No one denies the significant challenges and the long way to go. A sustained effort will be needed to increase the essential participation of women in education, work and decision-making. The upcoming

elections will be an important opportunity to increase women's participation in public life. Women have a role to play as voters, activists and political candidates. We hope that a concerted effort by the Government, the Independent Election Commission and civil society, with the support of UNAMA, will make real progress in that area possible.

Women also played a role in the recent success of the second meeting of the Kabul Process as members of the High Peace Council or through the support of women's organizations for the peace offer put on the table. Belgium fully supports the declaration of the Kabul peace process and congratulates the Government of Afghanistan on having obtained broad national and international support for a generous and concrete peace offer. It is now up to the Taliban to answer. We also commend the Government of Uzbekistan for organizing an international conference on peace and development in Afghanistan in Tashkent at the end of this month. International and especially regional support for Afghanistan's peace process and development is essential for achieving sustainable progress.

The meeting rose at 1.50 p.m.